

JANUARY 2017

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2017 PREVIEW

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Negative Effects on Kids By Staying Indoors

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Poor Health

Let's start with one of the most serious negative effects on kids by staying indoors. When children stay inside, they tend to spend their time doing sedentary things such as watching TV, sitting on the couch, exploring the Internet and playing video games. Children need at least an hour of moderate or vigorous exercise each day, and an indoor lifestyle makes this difficult

to achieve. This inactivity can lead to weight gain, reduced bone strength and poor cardiovascular health, among other concerning health consequences.

Poor Social Skills

When young people play outdoors, they are more likely to play with others, and their social skills are influenced by these interactions. Children who play outdoors are more likely to develop relationships with other children, and their social skills improve as a result. Children who stay indoors most of the time, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in solitary activities that don't allow them to stretch their social muscles. Technology is a poor substitute for social interaction in the "real world."

Dependency on Electronics

Although an addiction to electronics is not yet a clinical diagnosis in the United States, there is no doubt in the minds of parents or experts that today's youths are "plugged in" to an unhealthy extent. It starts at an early age, as parents hand their toddlers cellphones for entertainment and distraction. By the time they are 8-10 years old, most children spend nearly eight hours a day with various media. That statistic jumps to 11 hours of electronics a day for teenagers. Consider limiting your children's use of electronics to decrease their dependency.



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COVER PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

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A COVER NOD TO FLW'S FUTURE



PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

A Tour pro, the All-American champ, one of the best sticks in all of Texas, two college championship contenders and a couple of high school standouts all gather at a boat ramp at dawn.

It's not the start of a weird joke. It's the scene of an early morning photo shoot the day before the start of the Costa FLW Series Championship at Table Rock Lake that produced this issue's special cover. For the record, it's the largest group of anglers ever assembled on the cover of *FLW Bass Fishing* and the first cover to feature a high school angler – in this case, two of them.

But this cover represents an even greater milestone than a cool piece of art. FLW's efforts are at an all-time high to provide tournament circuits for everyone and a way for beginner anglers to learn skills and advance up the ranks. The anglers shown symbolize that successful system, as all of FLW's tournament circuits are represented here not just by anglers, but by highly skilled, experienced tournament fishermen. Everyone here has accomplished something significant on the water. They all have sponsors, either personally or through a club or school. And they're all highly competitive at their respective levels.

They are, from left to right: brothers Tate (16) and Eli (18) Brumnett of Wagoner, Okla., winners of the 2016 Student Angler Federation High School Fishing FLW/TBF Open at Grand Lake; 2016 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League All-American champ Jeremy Lawyer of Sarcoxie, Mo.; FLW Tour pro Greg Bohannon of Rogers, Ark.; Costa FLW Series pro Russell Cecil of Willis, Texas; and Taylor Schmitt and Curtis Lilly, who make up one of five McKendree University teams to qualify for the 2017 FLW College Fishing National Championship.

What a crew, huh?

FLW truly is the tournament organization of inclusion. Yeah, I'm tooting the company horn a little bit, but I'm proud to do it. I'm particularly proud of the "downward growth" trend that's led to the development of more opportunities for young anglers recently.

Today there are more than 700 colleges and universities participating in FLW College Fishing. FLW and The Bass Federation are rolling out a greatly expanded High School Fishing program this season that'll include 76 tournaments (see more on page 10), and projections are for more than 20,000 students to participate in 2017. New programs are even in the works for middle school and elementary fishing programs, as well as a mentoring project that'll pair high school kids who hope to compete at the next level with current college anglers. The nonprofit FLW Foundation is also expanding its youth outreach and fishing programs at more tournaments around the country.

FLW is growing, and in this editor's opinion, it's growing in the right direction.

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Scott Martin
Winner of 2016
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TABLE ROCK LAKE — NOV. 5, 2016





YOUTHFUL DOMINANCE

Young guns helping young guns succeed is one way to describe this scene. Zack Birge is one of the most successful young pros in FLW's ranks. Here, he offers some assistance with the net to another rising star in the tournament world, Tyler Sheppard. Interestingly, Birge and Sheppard are not only the same age – 25 – but they share the same birthday: April 11, 1991.

A co-angler, Sheppard was paired with Birge on the final day of the 2016 Costa FLW Series Championship at Table Rock and made the most of the opportunity by finishing off a wire-to-wire victory in the co-angler division. The outcome wasn't as successful for Birge, who took over the lead on the pro side on day two but fell to third on the last day.

The man who beat out Birge for the title, Pat Fisher, is visible fishing the shoreline in the background, with two media boats observing.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

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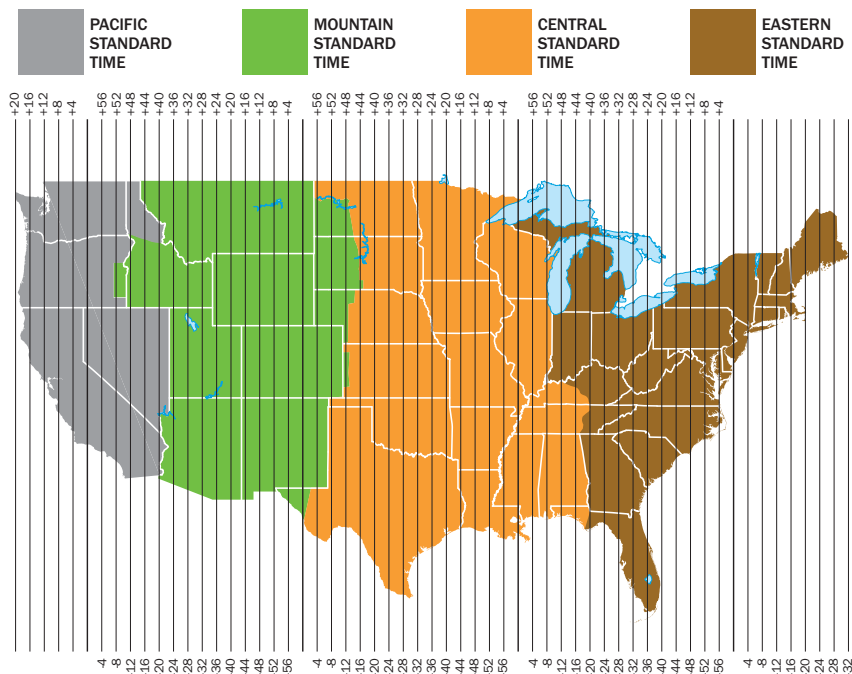
FISHING LEAGUE WORLDWIDE

Please allow 4-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.



SOLAR TABLE

JANUARY 2017



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

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

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

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South Africa Kicks Off Inaugural Cast-for-Cash Season

FLW South Africa kicked off its new tournament enterprise in November 2016 with its SA BASS Cast-for-Cash series. Competition is divided into five geographic divisions – Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Southern-Cape – and each division consists of seven tournaments.

Anglers compete on two-person teams, with the top 30 percent in the season standings in each division qualifying for the FLW South Africa Championship. The top two teams at the championship will advance to the Costa FLW Series Championship at Kentucky Lake in November 2017.

At press time, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo had hosted their first events, with Southern-Cape scheduled to begin in mid-December and Kwa-Zulu Natal kicking off in January.

South Africa is the fifth nation to join FLW's International Division, along with Canada, Mexico, South Korea and China. For more information, visit flwsouthafrica.com.



MAXFIELD, ELLISON TO HEAD FLW'S HIGH SCHOOL FISHING EFFORTS



FLW and The Bass Federation recently announced a new program to expand the scope of High School Fishing in 2017. As part of the expansion, FLW and TBF will host a series of more than 20 Opens across the country, in addition to 44 state championships and the HSF National Championship.

Dave Maxfield has been named as FLW's new HSF tournament director. Maxfield's experience in tournament fishing and youth sports dates back several decades. He began fishing the Red Man series, the predecessor to the T-H Marine Bass Fishing League, in the early '80s and joined FLW as an assistant tournament director in 1997. He's directed BFL events full time for FLW since 2000. Maxfield also coached youth football, basketball and baseball at various levels for 23 seasons.



Scott Ellison

Joining Maxfield is Scott Ellison in the role of youth director and promotions manager. Ellison has been with FLW since 2008 in various roles, most recently as promotions manager and manager of angler relations. Ellison joined FLW after earning his Master of Business Administration degree from Murray State University, where he served as president of the Student Government Association from 2005 to 2007.

Altogether, FLW and TBF will host 76 HSF events in 2017. For complete details on the expansion, check out the 2017 season preview beginning on page 42. Or visit highschoolfishing.org.



Dave Maxfield



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ROB NEWELL

Brad Knight reflects on his year as the reigning champ

.....

Once a Forrest Wood Cup winner is crowned, what happens after the confetti falls, the check is deposited and the Cup takes up its new home in the reigning champion's house? When does it actually "sink in" that being a Forrest Wood Cup champion is a reality? How does it change an angler's life?

To find out, I asked Brad Knight about his life since winning the Forrest Wood Cup in 2015. I chose "BK" because the Forrest Wood Cup was Knight's first win as a professional angler. So many other previous Cup champions had won national-level titles before grasping the Cup. But for Knight, his Cup win was a double doozy in that his inaugural victory at the Tour level also just happened to be the biggest in the sport.

Sinking In

According to Knight, the experience of becoming a champion was nearly overwhelming.

"The last thing I remember was turning in my key fob to the check-in boat on the final day at Lake Ouachita, and then the next six weeks were a complete blur," he says. "I really don't remember much about that time period. It changes

your life so suddenly. One minute you're Average Joe Tournament Fisherman, and the next minute you're a fishing celebrity. There is no instruction manual for how to proceed."

For several weeks after he returned home, Knight's house became a revolving door of family and friends wishing to congratulate him personally.

"The only thing I can compare it to is having a baby," Knight says. "Everyone wanted to come over and see the trophy in person. It was crazy."

After his company left each night, Knight stayed up even later answering texts and emails. What little sleep he did get was broken up by the too-good-to-be-true syndrome, where he would wake up wondering if winning the Cup really happened.

"I literally had to put the Cup in our bedroom so I could see it when I woke up from those dreams," Knight admits. "Then I'd just look at it, knowing no one could take it away – and that's probably when it finally started to sink in that I had won."

Business Plans

Winning the Cup finally put to rest Knight's nagging question of whether

professional fishing was truly a real business for him.

"I spent so many years running the roads, chasing this dream," he says. "When you drop 12 grand on a couple of bad tournaments, you start to wonder whether this is really the right thing to be doing for your family. Winning the Cup legitimized professional fishing as my business."

Ironically, not having many sponsors before his win actually worked to his benefit after earning the Cup victory.

"When I started fishing pro-level tournaments, I refrained from signing entry-level pro-staff deals with lure or tackle companies," he says. "I didn't participate in any of those wear-a-patch-for-30-percent-off type of programs. That turned out to be a huge blessing because I was not beholden to those companies when I won the Cup. They did not already own my likeness for 10 bags of worms. I was more of a free agent to pursue solid compensation deals after the win."

With that, Knight became obsessed with the proposal process, working on sponsor pitches tirelessly to capitalize on his win and eventually adding key sponsors such as Strike King to his resume.

The Fame

After a year of media exposure, Knight says the unexpected consequence of being a Cup winner was being recognized everywhere he went.

"It's one thing to be recognized at sport shows and seminars when you're in the fishing environment," Knight says. "But it's another thing when you're out to dinner with the family and people come up out of nowhere and just start talking fishing – for hours. I have always been cordial and as accommodating as possible, but at times I just wanted to turn myself off and not feel like I had to be 'on' all the time."

His brush with fame has given Knight a new appreciation for what NASCAR drivers, sports legends and music stars deal with all the time.

"I'm a pretty private person, so it was a real eye-opener to see what the power of media can do," he adds.

On the Water

As far as his fishing, Knight says winning the Cup in 2015 did not change his overall approach to tournaments in 2016.

"Winning the Cup did little to boost my overall confidence," he says. "I say that because if you're going to compete at this level, you better already have a pretty high level of confidence. To pay the kind of money we do to compete is not something you want to do unless you have a tremendous amount of confidence in yourself to begin with. So it's not like I roll into tournaments now saying, 'I'm a Forrest Wood Cup champion, so I'm going to win this one, too.' It doesn't really work that way."

Knight does admit that winning the Cup has given him a little more breathing room on the water.

"I can take a few more risks during tournaments," Knight explains. "I can try some off-the-wall stuff that I might not have done before. So it has freed me up in that respect."

"Also, I'm not as hard on myself after bad events," he continues. "We as pro anglers are our own harshest critics. As competitors, that's the way it should be. But sometimes I think we can be too hard on ourselves to a fault, and it hampers performance. So I've tried to lighten up on myself just a bit. During a long drive home after a bad event I only beat myself up for six hours. Instead of 12." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER





The Greatest Night Tournament Of Them All

.....

The history of tournament fishing is waypoints with exceptional characters – some who are famous and many more who are not. Yet on one level or another they all supplied building blocks in the formative years of the sport.

Bill Anderson of Cullman, Ala., was one such promoter who helped entrench tournament fishing in his home state, where it's now second only to college football in the pecking order of the citizenry's obsessions.

Though there are some huge day-light bass events these days, nobody would dispute that Anderson's boat dealership put on the biggest night-time tournament ever. In fact, for several years the *Guinness Book of Records* regarded the Anderson Boats Bass Classic on Lewis Smith Lake as the grandest of them all – day or night.

Anderson, who passed away in 2001 at age 71, saw his tournament as a way to plug his dealership and support bass fishing in general. What is not so clear is why Anderson, who was something of a tobacco-chewing iconoclast to begin with, decided to hold his event at night: from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. For whatever reason, his tournament was always in July or August and coincided with the full moon for that

month. The inaugural event took place on July 18, 1981, and drew 206 boats. Another tournament pioneer, Robert Melvin of Birmingham, served as weighmaster, his equipment being a Toledo scale set on a card table with two chairs behind it.

That first year, when the entry fee was \$50 per boat, Lacy Robinson and Cotton McClain of Jasper, Ala., took home the championship purse of \$2,000. Anderson, a professional boat racer in the '60s who once set a world record in Unlimited IV class at the unheard of speed of 73.6 mph, never did anything in half measures, but even he was surprised by the reception his tournament received. It was the start of a summer snowball that rolled along and grew into something much larger. In time the event attracted weekend anglers from throughout the South and Midwest, among them promising newcomers with the talent and ambition to progress to the professional level.

Within five years the tournament had swollen to 742 boats – three flights of 200 with 142 boats in the fourth flight – and it took 52 minutes for all of them to clear the staging area. Depending on how good the fishing was, the weigh-in might progress for hours. From dusk to dawn, the lights of

the boats looked like so many fireflies flitting around the lake as they raced from fishing hole to fishing hole, though such movement diminished as the long night progressed and participants began to snooze in place.

In 1987, when the tournament caught the attention of Guinness' record keepers, 795 boats were involved. By that time, the Anderson Boats Bass Classic had attained national stature, and the sheer act of winning it or finishing high had become as important to most anglers as any prize money.

There were a number of reasons for the event's success. The timing was right, and the format was unique. It didn't hurt that Ranger Boats – with whom Anderson had signed on as a dealer in 1968 – was one of many sponsors that provided prizes. Ranger even anted up a boat that was given away in a drawing to a lucky participant.

The most important ingredient to success was Anderson, whose love for the sport provided him with the perseverance to make his namesake tournament something that fishermen wanted to be part of. The biggest night tournament of them all faded from history within a few years after his death as his family got out of the boat business, though not before Anderson was able to see his creation become an event for the record books. ■



A Ranger Boats dealer in the 1970s and 1980s, Bill Anderson devised a large-scale night tournament as a means of promoting his dealership in Alabama, and the event evolved into the largest bass tournament of all time.

TECHNIQUES | SCIENCE | PEOPLE | FACTS | ADVICE

TAKEOFF



What's Inside:

James Watson's tricks for flipping docks with spoons

Where bass go under the ice

Understanding Florida bass transitions in spring

RECORD ALERT: the chase for 50 straight limits

BRANDON COBB IS LIVING THE DREAM ON TOUR

How to rig a boat for fishing heavy grass

Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege and Curtis Niedermier

WHAT TO WATCH FOR THIS MONTH:

48- TO 58-DEGREE WATER*

Water temperature ranges vary greatly throughout the country in late winter, but when it hits the 48- to 58-degree range, as it often does in January in Alabama, Scott Canterbury suggests reaching for a subtle, tight-wobbling flat-sided balsa crankbait.

"The pattern can be good on transitions, but usually that's later in the spring," he says. "Usually it's just on those channel-swing banks. And they get on red clay points a lot in January. And roadbeds."

Canterbury suggests 6- or 8-pound-test line on a baitcaster, but he will use a spinning rod in windy conditions.

**Is your favorite lake still frozen in January? No fear. Apply these tactics later in the spring when the water temperature reaches this critical prespawn range.*



MATT AREY'S LESSON LEARNED: SLOW DOWN IN FLORIDA

Quaker State pro Matt Arey says he learned a valuable lesson in fishing for Florida-strain bass in the early season during his first major event at Lake Okeechobee.

"A cold front came through," he recalls. "The biggest lesson I learned in that situation is if you think you're fishing slow enough in Florida in a cold front, you're not fishing slow enough. You can't fish slow enough."

While some anglers preach a fast, reaction-bite approach in that situation, Arey relies on a different tact. If he's located fish around thick reed heads or mats, Arey's strategy is to pick apart the area to try and "hit them in the head" with his bait. More often, however, he's targeting hayfields or isolated reeds where there aren't any mats that the fish can lay up under. In those situations, he relies on an ultra-light Texas-rigged worm, which he dead-sticks.

"It's not my style to fish super slow," he says. "That is one of the hardest things I've had to overcome while fishing down there in those conditions."

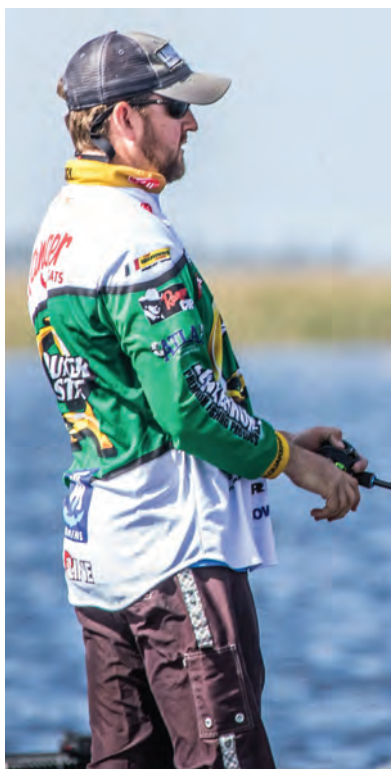


PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH

3 FLIPPING PRODUCTS TO TRY:



1. Brandon McMillan

Flat Out Tungsten weights by BassAddictionGear.com

"Tungsten weights are notorious for chipping, but these won't. That not only saves time, but it keeps line from getting frayed inside the weight. The paint finish is flat, which gives the bait a more natural appearance, too."



2. Mike Surman

Witch Doctor Tackle X75 Hydrilla Gorilla Casting Rod

"The rod is specifically built for heavy mat fishing with 1- to 2-ounce weights. It features a softer tip that allows you to move the fish for a rock-solid hookset, and a backbone for pulling fish quickly from heavy cover."



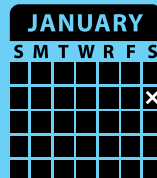
3. Matt Greenblatt

Gary Yamamoto Custom Baits Sanshouo Salamander

"The body is bulky enough for flipping, and the appendages are small enough for slipping through heavy cover. The body composition is great, too. It is a little stiffer so it resists hook fouling, but still softer than a lot of other flipping baits."

JAN. 14: THE BASS FISHING NEW YEAR

It's a new year for bass fishing, and at FLW, the bass drops on the 2017 season on Jan. 14 with the first T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Gator Division event at Florida's Lake Okeechobee and the FLW College Fishing Southeastern Conference opener at Lake Seminole in Georgia.



SPOONING DOCKS

WRENCHING BASS OUT FROM UNDER DOCKS WITH A SPOON IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

By Curtis Niedermier

When he put a butt whuppin' on fellow pros in a televised bass tournament at Center Hill Lake in 2016, Missouri's James Watson unveiled a tactic that, while popular in the Ozark region near his home, had been waiting for someone to bust it out on the national scene. That day, Watson waylaid bass after bass by flipping a spoon to a single dock. Watson showed that the technique, though frustrating at times, has potential for big catches in small windows.

"That's what really motivates me is that I could find, on a tournament day, the mother lode sitting within 20 feet of each other or sitting in one or two stalls on one boat dock, and I could jack them for an hour," he says.

Here, Watson details his approach to the tactic.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD



Watson's 4 Keys To the Bite

1. Water clarity

"This is not a technique you use in cloudy, dingy water. It doesn't have to be gin-clear water to catch them, but they need to be able to see it 2 or 3 feet away."

2. Docks

"It's great at deep-water impoundments that have floating docks, not fixed docks or pole docks, with cables coming off them and lots of boat slips."

3. Depth

"You want the shallowest part of the dock that you're attacking to be 20 feet deep. Anything shallower is really a waste of time."

4. Season

"I'm not a big fan of it in February, March or April. Really, the only bad months are those three."

Two Spoons for Docks

In the winter, and anytime the water temperature is less than 75 degrees, Watson uses a 7/8-ounce War Eagle Jiggin' Spoon

"I like that spoon because it has a very direct and fast fall," he says.

Watson's theory is that the bass are lazier

in cold water and not as willing to chase. The straight-falling lead slab plummets past them and elicits a reaction strike.

His option for warmer months is the Bass Pro Nitro Flash Casting Spoon. It's stamped from metal with a thin, broad body that flutters around as it falls.



Color Choices

Watson uses gold on cloudy days and white or cole slaw (white and chartreuse) on sunny days.

Play the Sun

On sunny days, target shaded areas.

"Overcast days are more difficult and less predictable," says Watson. "Most of the time on overcast days they're not tucked up underneath the docks. They're on the outside of the docks, under corners or cables. Most cables are on big blocks. Those cables are great places to find bass on overcast days."

Depth

The depth where bass are suspending and the depth of the bottom can be patterned. Also, sometimes they're on the deep side of the dock, or vice versa. Trial and error is the only method for figuring it out.

The Presentation

Spoon fishing is close-combat work. Watson keeps his boat positioned just far enough back that he has room to maneuver his rod. Then he tries to flip the spoon in places that other anglers aren't willing to go.

"I'm a one-flipper," he says. "I'll flip once on each side of a stall if there's a boat there, or

once in an empty stall, and then I'll bring my bait back in."

For the proper free-fall, hold the rod at 9 o'clock and keep slight thumb pressure on the reel spool as the spoon sinks.

"Never leave slack in the line," says Watson. "You let it go. You'll know when one gets it."

Landing Fish

If you get bit in an open stall, set the hook hard and simultaneously reel as fast as possible. If there are obstacles, play the fish before getting it up to the surface where it can get hung. Then reach out with the net, or, if you're brave enough, swing the fish over and into the boat. ■



BASS UNDER ICE

WHERE THEY GO IN WINTER UP NORTH

By TJ Maglio

In the northern reaches of the country, the bass season is put to bed right around the time ice starts to form on the lakes, ponds and reservoirs that dot the region. For species such as walleyes, northern pike and various types of panfish, the hard-water fishing season is just getting ramped up. Yet, for whatever reason, bass seem to pull a disappearing act as soon as the water freezes.

Sure, bass are caught each winter by ice anglers, but those catches are almost always incidental in nature, and outside of a couple of unique regional hot spots it's difficult to consistently target and catch bass through the ice.

So what gives? Why do bass go the way of the ghost once the ice forms?

Dr. Caleb Hasler, a fisheries biologist with the University of Illinois, is one of the few scientists on the planet to investigate bass behavior under the ice. In a recent study, he and his fellow researchers tracked tagged largemouth bass under the ice using radio telemetry, and their findings shed light on bass behavior after the big freeze.



PHOTO BY BILL LINDNER PHOTOGRAPHY

Though bass are often caught by accident through the ice, they're normally very difficult to consistently target. What gives?

Where They Go

"One of the most surprising things we found while we were following the tagged bass is that they moved a whole lot more than we thought they would," Hasler says. "Obviously, they swim a whole lot slower, but bass in our study routinely circumnavigated our small sample lake during the course of a single day."

Bass in Halser's study also routinely suspended a meter or two beneath the ice sheet and just cruised around the lake. It's not clear whether these fish were feeding, or just taking advantage of preferable conditions at that level.

Where They Don't

"We also studied oxygen levels throughout our lake,

as they are known to plummet during hard winters," Hasler says. "Not surprisingly, the bass avoided the areas that had the lowest oxygen levels."

Areas they avoided were shallow, grassy portions of the lake and extremely deep locations where, presumably, decomposition was occurring. Decomposition of vegetation depletes oxygen,

so areas with the most vegetation in the summer typically have the lowest oxygen levels in the winter, with the exception of early ice season, before the grass dies.

Do They Eat?

Past studies have shown that in laboratory conditions bass essentially stop eating when water temperatures dip below 45 degrees, but in the real world thousands of bass are caught each year in water colder than this.

"Wild populations of bass acclimatize to the cold weather over time," Hasler says. "If you study northern bass' annuli [growth rings on scales], they show that most individuals experience at least some growth during the winter." ■

What About Smallmouth Bass?

The vast majority of bass catches under the ice each year are of the green variety. Outside of a couple of unique locations, catching a smallmouth bass through the ice is a feat that most ice fishermen go their entire lives without witnessing. A big factor in this is that they're likely not around. Research in Canada showed that smallmouth bass tend to winter by the hundreds in tiny, specific "holes," vastly reducing the likelihood of an angler finding them.

"Smallmouth bass are also known to be much more dormant during the winter than largemouth bass," Hasler says. "This dramatically reduces the number of feeding opportunities they encounter each winter, and is a likely reason that so few are caught by anglers."

IN AND OUT OF GRASS

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE AQUATIC VEGETATION PLAYS IN EARLY-SEASON BASS POSITIONING CAN LEAD TO MORE AND BIGGER CATCHES

By David A. Brown

"Bass in grass" commonly defines Florida fishing, but catching fish consistently requires an understanding of when and where the fish move in the green stuff. Some of it's the result of seasonal patterns programmed into the fish's DNA, and environmental conditions also enter into the equation.

What's so special about aquatic vegetation to bass in early spring? Sunshine State native and FLW Tour pro Brandon McMillan lists the top grass attraction as being shelter during harsh conditions such as a cold front or when bright sunlight and high pressure follow fronts.

The next big motivator is spawning season, with fish taking up different positions for prespawn, spawn and postspawn periods.



PHOTO BY ROB NEWELL

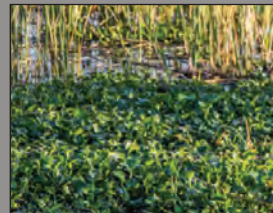
Of course, it doesn't hurt that most of the native vegetation that provides cover for bass also harbors crawfish, bluegills and golden shiners – dietary staples for hungry largemouths any time of the year.

Habitat Preference

Grass types vary widely in Florida. In early spring, McMillan first looks for hydrilla and hyacinth mats, "the Grade-A stuff" where bass lay up during cold fronts or high-pressure situations. After that, his next choices are types of vegetation with vertical stalks such as cattails, round reeds and Kissimmee grass/needle grass (often called "hay grass"). Tour pro Bradley Hallman adds lily pad stems to the mix. Like cattails, lily pads offer the prime vertical, hard stems bass prefer to spawn near.



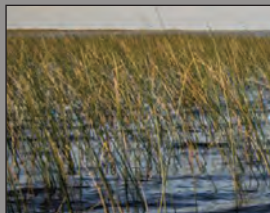
HYDRILLA



HYACINTH MATS



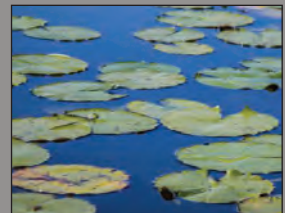
CATTAILS



ROUND REEDS



HAY GRASS



LILY PADS

Specific Zones

Hallman focuses on dense vegetation such as thick cattail heads during cold fronts. But when warm weather spurs spawning movement, he looks to less dense cover where holes and gaps offer protected nesting spaces. In his fishing neighborhood, that's often stands of reeds.

"The current weather conditions are most relevant to whether you're fishing reeds with holes in it, or reeds that are thick, thick, thick," Hallman says. "They're all coming in to spawn, but how far along they are in that process depends on the weather."

"As long as the water's clean and it's 60 degrees or higher, the bass are going to be in the grass, looking to spawn," McMillan adds. "When they're not spawning, they'll be in the thickest grass they can find."

Exit Plan

Between spawning waves, bass are less homebound under cloudy, overcast skies or any low-light periods and more inclined to roam through grass and along well-defined edges. Breezy afternoons – even during partly sunny times – will also pull fish out of the grass.

"The strike zones will be longer," Hallman says of these "looser" periods. "They'll come farther to get a bait."

When the weather is stable, Hallman anticipates multiple transitions during a day on the water. Early mornings typically find the fish patrolling grass edges to feed before tucking under the shady canopies when the sun gets overhead. Dimmer light of late afternoon or midday clouds could also stimulate outward movement and more feeding activity – as long as the fish haven't committed to beds. ■

CHASING 50

TRACKING DOWN THE
FLW TOUR RECORD FOR
CONSECUTIVE LIMITS

By Curtis Niedermier

Like baseball fans, bass fishing fans count everything. They're statisticians who seek out records and results and facts that help punctuate a tournament performance or bring perspective to an angler's career. And as in baseball, in bass fishing there are plenty of records set every season that only get a little attention here and there – a mention during a highlight reel, maybe. Then there are the big ones. The records that draw gobs of attention.

This season, many eyes will be on a record that defines consistency among professional anglers. That is, the most consecutive limits weighed in during major Tour competition, which includes FLW Tour Majors, FLW Tour Invitationals and Forrest Wood Cups. Several pros have a real shot at breaking the record this season.

THE MAN TO BEAT

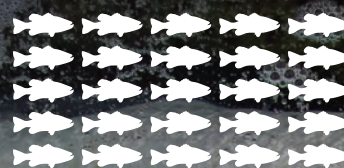


CODY MEYER
Auburn, Calif.

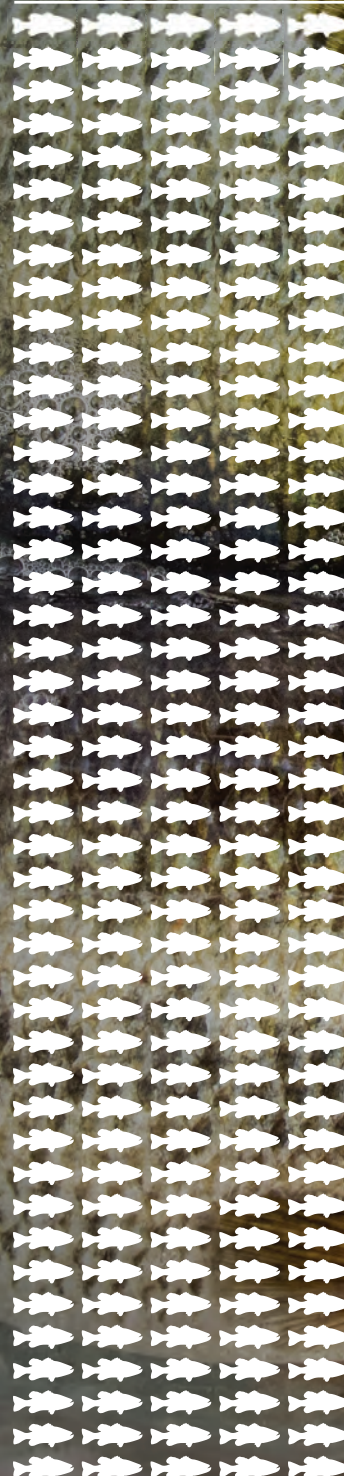
MEYER'S RECORD

On March 9, 2014, California pro Cody Meyer brought in a four-fish stringer of bass that weighed 9 pounds, 14 ounces on the final day of the FLW Tour event at Lake Hartwell to finish fourth. It had been a cold, rainy and miserable tournament much of the week, and Meyer's catch would have gotten little attention if not for what it was not: a limit.

The four-fish catch ended Meyer's streak of 50 consecutive limits in FLW Tour Majors and Forrest Wood Cup competition, establishing a new record that still stands.

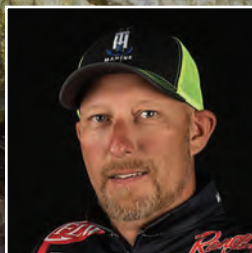


50 LIMITS = 250 BASS



THE LONGEST CONSECUTIVE LIMIT STREAKS OF ALL TIME

**Active streak by an angler who's competing on Tour in 2017.*

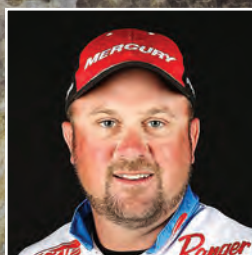


THE BEST SHOT AT BREAKING THE RECORD

WESLEY STRADER

Spring City, Tenn.

The earliest that Wesley Strader could break the record is day two at stop No. 2 at Lake Travis, if he makes the top-10 cut at the opener. If he never makes a top-20 cut between now and setting the record, but catches a limit every day, Strader could break it on day two at stop No. 3 at the Harris Chain.



WHO'S NEXT

DAVID DUDLEY

Lynchburg, Va.

The earliest that David Dudley could break the record is day one at stop No. 4 at Lake Cumberland, if he makes the top-10 cut at the first three events. If he never makes a top-20 cut between now and setting the record, but catches a limit every day, Dudley could break it on day one at the finale on the Potomac River.

7

The number of anglers on Tour who could break the record this season. They are Wesley Strader (45), David Dudley (38), Michael Neal (28), Jeff Sprague (28), Jimmy Reese (27), Matt Arey (22) and Andy Morgan (20).

14

The minimum number of competition days for any pro who fishes the full seven-tournament season, not including any top-20 or top-10 cut days.

31

The maximum number of days that a pro could compete on the 2017 Tour if he makes every top-10 cut, qualifies for the Cup and makes the top-20 cut at the Cup.



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DREAMS, YOUNG AND OLD

BRANDON COBB FULFILLS YOUTHFUL ASPIRATION WITH HELP FROM GRANDPA

By Sean Ostruszka

PHOTOS BY ANDY HAGEDON

It's a simple headline for a simple story; the kind of headline you often see in community papers.

Brandon Cobb, 4-year fishing veteran at age 7, dreams of being professional

A pair of black-and-white pictures accompanies the Greenwood, S.C., *Index-Journal* article. The main photo is of a young Brandon Cobb and his dad, Doug, fishing in the family pond. The inset is a casting shot of Brandon and his younger brother, Hunter. In both, Brandon holds a spinning rod that looks three sizes too big for his small frame – his winnings from his first tournament the week earlier. His pride of purpose and intensity are evident by the look on his face.

Brandon isn't quoted much in the article – too shy at the time – but both he and his dad report that the youngster wants to be a professional angler someday. Doug brags about how he and his son fish “tournaments” against one another every afternoon in the pond, and how Brandon jumps out of bed every morning at daylight to go fishing.

It's a cute, feel-good story. Brandon's mom, Amy, still has the clipping, as any proud parent would. After all, it's the kind of clipping parents love to pull out years later when they reminisce about how their son dreamed of being a cowboy or their daughter a ballerina. Only, almost 20 years later, the “fishing veteran at age 7”

actually is a professional angler. And not only that, he fulfilled his dream faster than most ever thought was possible.

A Little Green From Greenwood

When you're 24 years old and become a professional fisherman, most observers would think you've been a stick your entire life, that you dominated local tournaments at 15 and regional tournaments by 20. And sure, Cobb's story follows along those lines ... to a point.

“I started tournament fishing when I was 12 or 13,” says Cobb, now 26. “I got my boating license, and my dad would drive me to the ramp, drop me in and then come back later to pick me up.”

His first win came at 14 on Lake Greenwood, and plenty more followed around his home in Greenwood, S.C. By 16 he was fishing T-H Marine Bass Fishing League tournaments, notching his first top 10 at 17 and his first Regional qualification the same season, in 2007.

At age 20, Cobb won 2010 Angler of the Year in the BFL Savannah River Division, and three seasons later he doubled-qualified for the BFL All-American when, in a single season, he finished second in one Regional and third in another.

That's more success at the local and regional level than most anglers experience during their entire careers. So it seemed logical when Cobb



In only two seasons on Tour, Cobb has made the top 10 at the Forrest Wood Cup twice.

made the leap to the FLW Tour in 2014 at age 24, fresh out of college at Clemson University. Only, Cobb admits, he was "a little green" that first season. In fact, while it's easy to focus on the early successes at the BFL level, it wasn't all top 10s and cashed checks leading up to his Tour debut.

"I'll admit, I lost a lot," says Cobb. "I got my teeth kicked in for a while, especially once I started trying to fish at the regional level. The year after I graduated, yeah, I finished second and third in those two BFL Regionals to make the All-American, but I also fished the B.A.S.S. Southern Opens and was absolutely horrible.

"But that's what made me a better fisherman. I never got discouraged. I always would spend time looking at what I could've done differently to improve. And that year fishing the Opens, I think I needed that to get the jitters out. I mean, when Cody Meyer or Brent Ehrler pulls up beside you, that's like 'holy crap' when you're only 23."

Cobb's rookie season on Tour told the story. He finished 154th in his first event at Lake Okeechobee, though, to be fair, reigning Forrest Wood Cup champ John Cox finished 175th in the same tournament. Cobb's next event was on Lake Hartwell, which was the one tournament he was banking on, since it's among his home waters. He cut his first check, but after day one he was in 93rd.

"I remember thinking, 'What am I doing? Why am I fishing this way? I've never fished this way before in my life,'" Cobb recalls. "The second day I went out and fished it like I would a local tournament and rebounded [to finish 36th], but that was just one of many mistakes I made that year."

Cobb wound up finishing 99th in points, though that's a bit misleading as he had to



Doug Cobb gives a fatherly tip to his 7-year-old son Brandon, who is using a new rod and reel at a pond near his home. He won his outfit at the Bowers-Rodgers tournament last weekend. Even though

the father-son team participated in the benefit tournament, 3-year-old Hunter says he can also get in some fishing time with big brother (inset).

Brandon Cobb, 4-year fishing veteran at age 7, dreams of being professional

GREENWOOD — Brandon Cobb is only seven years old, but his eyes are already glancing toward the time he can go fishing

OUTDOORS
By Jim



quickly said he also caught one that weighed four pounds. Hanging his head and smiling, he added, "I caught the littlest one that I like last weekend when

it early." Any is the only family member who doesn't care much for fishing. The youngest, Hunter, age 3, has his own rod and reel, and stands along side Brandon at

FISHING REPORT

COLUMBIA (AP) — week's fishing report South Carolina Department of Natural Resources:

FRESHWATER

Mountains-Piedmont

LAKE GREENWOOD — mouth bass: Good, using worms early in the morning. Striped bass: Fair, using spoons and jigs in 20 feet of water. Crappie: Good, using jigs in 20 feet of water. Catfish: Good using worms. Bream: Good using minnows or worms. White bass: Good using minnows.

LAKE HARTWELL — mouth bass: Fair, using worms and lizards in deep water. Striped bass: Excellent, using back herring in 25 feet of water. Some schooling in place early and late. Crappie: Good, using minnows in brush. Fair, fishing in creeks. Herring: Bream: Excellent, using crickets and worms. Two to 10 feet of water.

LAKE RUSSELL — bass: Fair, using crankbaits or spinnerbaits. Fair, using minnows and bridges.

LAKE THURMOUTH — bass: Fair, using topwater lures, crankbaits. Striped bass: Fair, using topwater spinnerbaits or topwater plugs. Crappie: Fair, using brush. Catfish: Fair, using minnows, live worms. Bream: Good, using minnows.

LAKE JOCSASSEE — Fair, using plastic worms. Crappie: Fair, using minnows. Catfish: Fair, using minnows. Bream: Good, using minnows.

LAKE KEOWEE — excellent, fishing early in the morning. Topwater lures or minnows.

skip one of the events to fish the BFL All-American he'd qualified for the previous year. His was a rookie season marked with many mistakes, yet it laid the groundwork for future success.

Cobb's second season saw him cut checks in the first five tournaments. He finished 17th in points and qualified for his first Forrest Wood Cup, which would prove pivotal. The 2015 Cup at Lake Ouachita would serve as his coming-out party in the fishing world.

There, Cobb found himself in third after day one. As it turned out it was not a fluke, as he stayed consistent throughout the championship and ended up finishing third for his first top 10 at the pro level. He only notched one more top 10 in his third season, but again, it was in the Forrest Wood Cup at Wheeler Lake.

"It's a little frustrating, because I've only made a top 10 at the Cup," says Cobb. "I'm usually better at tough tournaments, though, and that's the Cup."

There's no doubt the 2016 Cup was among the toughest ever due to intense heat and a pressured fishery. For Cobb, though, the 2016 Cup was challenging for more than just the fishing.

Hot Dogs, Flowers And Support

When you're 24 years old and become a professional fisherman, it begs one big question: How? How does a recent college graduate make the jump so quickly? How does he afford the boat, entry fees and travel expenses?

The answer lies where the people of Greenwood County go for the best barbecue sandwiches and hot dogs:

Barrett's. Part gas station, part convenience store, part tire shop, part flower shop, Barrett's is the family business founded by Cobb's grandparents, John and Lounettie Barrett. And as supportive as Cobb's parents have been in his career, his grandfather has been as well — and then some.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without my granddad," says Cobb. "He wasn't even a fisherman. He was just always proud of me and what I was trying to do."

"Every time I'd come back from a tournament and I said I didn't win or do well, he'd always say, 'You'll win the next one.'"

Don't think Cobb was gifted his first season on Tour, though. He'd pocketed his fair share of money from his local and regional tournaments, and paid for everything he could with it. But



Cobb's family support system, including his mother, Amy, helped the young pro navigate the path to the Tour level.

whenever he needed any help, that's where his grandfather came in.

That support and pride is what made the news the Monday before the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup so hard for Cobb. His grandfather had suffered a heart attack and was in critical condition.

"I almost left to go home when I found out during practice," says Cobb. "But I knew him. I knew he wouldn't want me to leave."

So Cobb stayed and fished what he calls the toughest tournament of his life. He says his focus was never fully on the tournament itself. When the final weigh-in was done, so was Cobb.

He immediately got on the road back to South Carolina with hope he might be able to see his grandfather one last time.

"He hadn't been coherent or awake much since the

heart attack," says Cobb. "But I made it home, and when I got in the hospital room he woke up for 15 minutes. I got to talk to him one last time and tell him how I did."

Cobb will forever cherish those 15 minutes more than the tournament. It also put into perspective how far he's come since he was a 7-year-old walking around the family pond and dreaming of being a professional fisherman.

"I think 7-year-old me would be pretty proud," says Cobb, "and I think 47-year-old me will be even more proud if I keep doing what I've been doing, learning and improving."

"When you're a kid, being a professional fisherman seems like a dream job. You don't realize it's the longest hours you'll ever work and more stressful than any day job. But when things go right, nothing compares." ■

Set Your Hook in South Carolina



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Photo courtesy of TakeMeFishing.org

Set your Hook in
South Carolina





TAKEOFF
BOAT RIGGING

RIGGING FOR GRASS

HOW THREE EXPERTS PREPARE THEIR BASS BOATS TO TACKLE HEAVY VEGETATION

By Joe Balog

PHOTO BY ERIC ENGBRETSON

Many of the best competitors in the world fish the FLW Tour. Through thousands of hours on the water, they've become intimately familiar with their equipment, often making revisions to it many of us would never dream up. While tackle mods get all the press, variables in boat rigging and operation often play a key role in major victories.

It's time to uncover the secrets; specifically, adjustments made by Florida punchers and flippers who deal with matted vegetation for a living. If you've ever struggled in the grass and wondered how the Sunshine State's best make it look easy, read on.



File the Prop

Martin's first bit of advice renders back to trolling motor prop principles.

"I carry a file with me in the boat," he says. "When I get a slight burr or nick in my trolling motor prop, I immediately file it out."

With 112 pounds of thrust, Martin's Minn Kota Ultrex offers plenty of power, but a smooth prop is still a must. According to our expert, any slight abrasions are the first to adhere to grass when a trolling motor prop begins to bind up. By having an ultra-smooth prop edge, Martin avoids such clogs more readily, and can maneuver through weeds at a slower, quieter speed.

"Some guys need to run their motors on high speed to get through the grass, and that makes a lot of noise. I like to ease through it and sneak around," he adds.



Keep the prop's edge smooth to avoid hanging up in the grass.

THE EXPERT

SCOTT MARTIN

Every fan of bass fishing knows Scott Martin. Growing up in Florida, the former Forrest Wood Cup champion is renowned for his prowess on grass-choked fisheries. In fact, it was his father, the legendary Roland Martin, who designed one of the first weedless trolling motor props. Mining grass is in the bloodline.

Tape it Up

Martin seeks to correct a basic problem at its source: weeds collecting on the trolling motor shaft. Some time ago, he noticed that a complete stoppage of forward momentum is often caused by grass on the shaft, which builds into a massive, floating island that must be dragged by the boat. To combat the clog, Martin rigs any cords or cables – such as that of a HydroWave – behind the trolling motor shaft, substituting a full sheath of electrical tape for cable ties.

Charge to the Max

A trolling motor is only as good as its batteries, so don't cheap out. Today, Martin relies on Lithium Pros batteries, meticulously maintained with a Minn Kota Precision charger. Recent charger advancements have been incredible, as new models are digitally controlled to maintain the best state of charge regardless of battery type, power surges, temperature fluctuations or humidity.



Change to a Minn Kota Prop

Kenney's No. 1 tip is a mix-and-match trolling motor setup. He relies on a MotorGuide X5.

"I swear it's quieter than any other motor," he says.

Yet, Kenney utilizes a Minn Kota prop for its superior "weedlessness." To make the prop fit on the MotorGuide's shorter prop shaft, Kenney uses a drill press to bore out a small amount of the inner hub of the prop. He secures it in place with a nylon lock nut.



A Minn Kota prop on a MotorGuide motor is Kenney's unique setup.

Install a Weed Cutter

Kenney further prevents grass buildup by installing a sharpened metal grass-cutting "blade" on his trolling motor's lower unit. There are several versions on the market, but the key with all of them is that they cut any vegetation that begins to wrap around the prop. The spinning prop then blows away the cut vegetation.

Kenney secures the blade as close as possible to the prop with a pair of hose clamps.

"You can go about anywhere, pretty much, once the cutter is installed," he says.

Change Sonar Color

Through trial and error, Kenney has determined that color pallet No. 13 on his Lowrance is best for determining hard-bottom areas within grass beds. Experimenting with such subtle changes can be key to unlocking grassy secrets.

THE EXPERT

JT KENNEY

Any discussion of anglers who are masters at flipping mats has to include JT Kenney's name. The million-dollar winner owns four FLW titles – all coming from lakes choked with grass. It's no coincidence – Kenney seeks the thick stuff. "I gravitate toward mats everywhere we go," he says. "I feel like any lake that has a lot of grass, that's where the fish are."



A weed cutter is like a mower blade – it cuts the grass so the prop won't bind.



THE EXPERT

MARK LUNDGREN

A solid competitor in the region's T-H Marine Bass Fishing League divisions, Mark Lundgren of St. Cloud, Fla., works at Toho Marine, the famed bass boat dealer south of Orlando. There, he keeps tabs on any new trends in fishing aquatic vegetation, and has perfected his own system.

Use a Hydraulic Plate to Push Through

While most grass fishing revisions center on the bow of the boat – specifically the trolling motor – Lundgren has found several factors at the transom that contribute to efficiency in heavy grass. For instance, a hydraulic jack plate provides more than top-end performance.

"Instead of trimming up when idling through thick grass, I lift the jack plate," he says. "Lifting the trim just raises the bow of the boat when I throttle, and pushes the rear down farther, which is exactly what I don't want. Lifting the jack plate raises the motor up, but keeps me level, allowing my Mercury to power through better."



Using a jack plate to raise the motor in heavy grass is more efficient than trimming up.

Shield All Transducers

Another rigging upgrade Lundgren relies on is a Transducer Shield and Saver, which protects the front and rear sides of the transducer. Lundgren rigs the plate on his rear transducer, located on the boat's transom. Doing so blocks any gaps or seams that might otherwise catch grass when Lundgren momentarily puts his boat in reverse to clear the prop or back out of a tight spot. In extreme cases, ripped-off transducers can otherwise be the result.



A transducer shield is good insurance for any skinny water where wood cover, rocks or grass might cause damage.

Upgrade Wiring

Lundgren utilizes the heaviest wire available for his trolling motor, regardless of boat brand. Today, most bass boats come with 6- or 8-gauge wire. However, Lundgren has found 4-gauge to offer even better performance. Voltage drop is lessened with heavier wire, thus maximum power is delivered at the trolling motor. With higher voltage being carried up front, the overall torque of the motor is better, and the length of charge is increased as the motor works less to deliver more.

Using a simple voltage calculation method, an upgrade from 8-gauge to 4-gauge wire, over a length of 20 feet, cuts voltage drop at the trolling motor by more than half.

While marine dealerships will gladly make the upgrade, there's really nothing to it for do-it-yourselfers. Most existing wires can be pulled through easily and swapped out. Be advised, however, that heavy copper wire runs a couple of bucks a foot, so the switch can be a bit costly.

Install a New Pull Cord

Even with the strongest thrust available at the bow, trolling motors still bog down in the thickest grass. Lifting and clearing the motor is a necessity, and a task that Lundgren has also tweaked.

"I replace my trolling motor rope with braided Dyneema, commonly used for sailboat rigging," he says.

This nearly indestructible cord features a 6,000-pound break limit and no-stretch characteristics, and it's easy to swap out with factory cords. A bonus: The price tag is only about 35 cents per foot. ■

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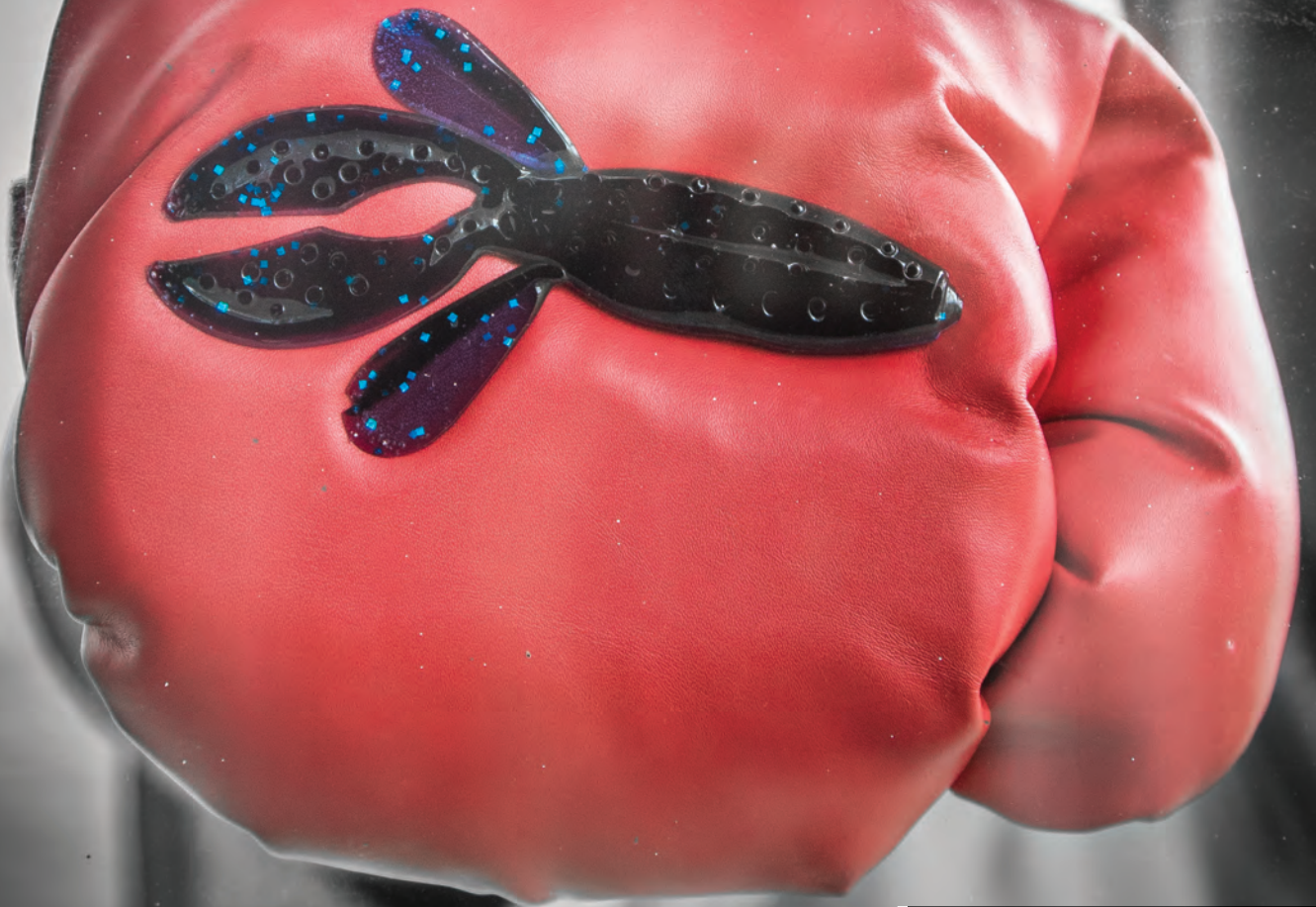
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GEAR

PRODUCTS AND INSIGHT TO HELP YOU CATCH FISH



What's Inside:

Lew's new Custom Pro
Speed Spool SLP Series reel

**BREAKING DOWN THE TOOLS
FOR PUNCHING MATS**

6 new products for the
2017 season

PHOTO BY MATT PACE



TEAM LEW'S CUSTOM PRO SPEED SPOOL SLP SERIES

By Matt Williams

Lew's is regarded as the earliest pioneer in low-profile baitcasting reels, and the company's Custom Pro Speed Spool SLP (Super Low Profile) Series takes the concept to all new heights. I own more than two dozen baitcasters, and not one of them sits any lower in the seat than this baby does. Yet, that's hardly the only reason the reel earned Lew's the Best Freshwater Reel award last July at ICAST 2016. The featherweight baitcaster is heavy on innovative traits designed with high performance, durability, convenience and ergonomics in mind.

First Impression

The first thing I noticed after cracking open the box is how light and compact the reel is. Weighing a scant 5.8 ounces, you could hide it in the palm of your hand if it weren't for the outsize

power handle and magnum Winn Grips knobs.

Lew's achieved the "super low profile" by machining the spool down to 1 1/4 inches in diameter, reducing the size of the frame/shell to accommodate it and adding an exclusive SLP foot platform that makes the reel ride low in the seat. The golden embossing and lettering make the reel pleasing to look at, too.

On the Water

Some baitcasters have trouble with lighter lures and smaller diameter lines, but this one didn't. I used it to throw everything from a 1/4-ounce shaky head on 10-pound-test fluorocarbon to a 1 3/8-ounce River2Sea Whopper Plopper with braid, and the reel definitely performed smooth as silk across the board.

The four-pin SpeedCast centrifugal braking system operates using a 27-point

external dial that allowed for a wide range of fine-tuning. Having such a range helped achieve maximum casting distance and prevent overruns with a variety of baits and in some stiff winds.

Final Thoughts

Lew's shaved off excess weight by using a one-piece aluminum frame sandwiched by C45 carbon side plates, but it doesn't appear that quality was sacrificed in the process. Instead, the company created a tough little customer that you can cast or flip with all day long with minimal fatigue.

One thing I really liked is the bowed carbon fiber handle. It measures roughly 3 3/4 inches long and is tipped with Winn's Dri-Tac grips for limited slip in wet conditions or when fishing with fish slime on the fingers. Together, these added up to winch-like control.

Three more handy features worth mentioning include the Speed Keeper retractable hook hanger, Speed Dial line size indicator and an easy access lube port.

The hook hanger is located on the inner gear wall and pivots outward for hanging baits and inward to stow. The line indicator is an easy-turn gold dial found on the tension knob face. Turn it left or right to the proper number as an easy reminder of the line size on the spool. I found them to be helpful features.

LINE INDICATOR



ON A DIET

The aircraft-grade Duralumin spool is machined down to 1 1/4 inches to allow for a smaller frame and lighter weight.



HOOK HANGER

It rotates out when needed.



NON-SLIP GRIP

The Winn Dri-Tac grips feature a ribbed texture to help ensure a solid hold when wet.

Performance Advice

To realize the full benefits that the Custom Pro SLP delivers, it should always be paired with a quality, well-balanced rod that is matched for the technique.

I strapped it to a 7-foot, 3-inch Lew's Custom Pro Speed Stick Series rod, and the outfit was so pleasant and comfortable to fish with that FLW Tour pro Jim Tutt of Longview, Texas, tried to con me out of it during a Costa FLW Series practice session at Fort Gibson Lake in Wagoner, Okla.

HITS & MISSES

- + Super light and ergonomically pleasing
- + Big knobs and handles improve leverage
- + Precision braking system with a wide range of settings
- + Retractable hook keeper for stowing baits easily
- + A fair price for premium craftsmanship
- No "slow" retrieve ratio for big crankbaits

>> IN ACTION



Comfort is a big-time selling point for this reel. The Custom Pro Speed Spool SLP is slim and light, with oversized Winn knobs. It's a pleasure to cast and wind all day with it.

APPLICATIONS

The Custom Pro Speed Spool SLP is a high-performance reel that you'll want to have set up for techniques that require a lot of accurate casts in a day, or when using baits that are difficult to cast. It's a high-performance model that could be your go-to reel.

It comes in three retrieve speeds in the right-handed model: 6.8:1, 7.5:1 and 8.3:1. A left-handed model is available in the 7.5:1 speed only. The fast speeds are ideal for a variety of techniques where gathering line quickly is imperative. ■

DETAILS

Price: \$259.99

Capacity: 110 yards of 12-pound-test monofilament

Gear Ratios: 6.8:1, 7.5:1 and 8.3:1 for right-handed; 7.5:1 for left-handed

Weight: 5.8 ounces

Contact: lews.com

BREAKING DOWN PUNCHING GEAR

THE BASIC TOOLS FOR TARGETING BASS IN HEAVY VEGETATION

By Matt Williams

When bass are buried up in thick vegetation, few tactics work better for getting at them and triggering reaction strikes than punching through with a Texas rig.

PHOTO BY MATT PAGE



ABOUT PUNCHING

Punching – whether accomplished with pitching or flipping techniques – is a tight-quarters, in-their-face power-fishing technique typically built around some sort of soft-plastic creature bait, a heavy hook, stout line and a sinker heavy enough to crash through cover and get the bait into the strike zone. The idea is to cover water and make vertical presentations through dense cover – sometimes in rapid succession – until a fish eats the bait.

TWO EXPERTS

Bradley Hallman –

The Norman, Okla., pro won the first FLW Tour event of his career last season at the opener on Lake Okeechobee. He flipped and punched tangled reed heads for the win and is an expert with a heavy rod in hand.



PHOTO BY JODY WELT



Peter Thliveros –

A veteran pro, Thliveros calls Florida home and has decades of experience punching dense vegetation in the Sunshine State and elsewhere.

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

THE BREAKDOWN

1. BAIT CHOICES

HALLMAN'S PICKS

Hallman generally goes with a smaller plastic, such as a Strike King Rage Bug, craw or beaver-style bait because it penetrates thick cover easier than a bigger creature such as a full-sized Zoom Brush Hog.

He thinks bait such as a Rage Bug or NetBait Paca Craw, which have active appendages, work best when fish are aggressive. A subtler Gambler BB Cricket or Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver gets the nod when fishing pressure or something else puts the fish in a funk.

Strike King
Rage Bug



NetBait Paca Craw



Reaction Innovations
Sweet Beaver



Gambler
BB Cricket



PETER T'S PICKS

Thliveros also is fan of small, compact baits because they slide in and out of thick cover easily. His favorite is the Zoom Z-Hog Jr.

"The bait has a really small profile and is very streamlined – not much bigger around than the weight – so it follows the weight through the hole extremely well," he says. "A more compact, streamlined bait allows you to penetrate with a lighter weight."



Zoom Z-Hog Jr.



2. COLORS AND RATTLES

HALLMAN'S ADVICE

It's hard to go wrong with black/blue and various green hues, says Hallman. He never adds dye, but he will occasionally use a rattle.

"I'll sometimes use a rattle when they aren't really eating it on the initial fall, or if I'm having to shake it to draw them from a distance," Hallman explains. "A rattle won't mean much if 80 to 90 percent of my bites are coming on the initial fall."

Add a rattle in dirty water or if fish aren't biting it on the initial fall.



PETER T'S ADVICE

Thliveros is a fan of darker colors such as black/blue, black neon, black sapphire, Okeechobee craw (green pumpkin/blue usually) and green pumpkin. He likes to dip the tips of the claws of green pumpkin baits in chartreuse dye if the fish are eating bluegills, and he prefers to use a rattle, especially in cooler water or in situations when the fish might need some help locating the bait.



3. LINE

Most anglers prefer braided line over fluorocarbon or monofilament when punching vegetation because it tends to slice through grass, resists abrasion, has no stretch and is super strong.

Hallman prefers 55-pound-test PowerPro braid, while Thliveros uses 50- to 65-pound-test Lew's Speed Line APT Braid.



4. HOOKS

Heavy-duty, straight-shank flipping hooks are preferred for punching in thick vegetation, especially in combination with braided lines and stiff rods, because the hooks resist flexing or bending on violent hooksets. The better ones have a welded eye to prevent super-line slippage.

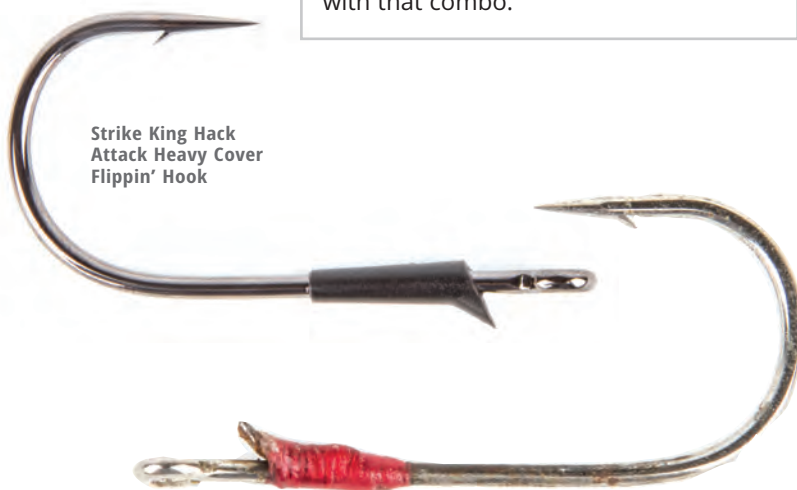
Hallman's favorite hook for punching mats is the Strike King Hack Attack Heavy Cover Flippin' Hook.

Thliveros uses a similar hook, but prefers to build his own using a nickel-plated spinnerbait trailer hook made from stout wire with a strong point and barb. The keeper is constructed from a section of a large copper staple (the kind used on cardboard boxes) or a plastic toothpick that is hand-shaped at the proper angle. He ties the keeper on with sewing thread and glues it in place. There are many online tutorials that explain this type of tying process, but it's similar to tying an eye on a rod or hair on a fly.

"It's a time-consuming process, but I'm a fisherman, and I don't mind taking the time to build eight to 10 good hooks that will last me two or three tournaments if I'm punching or flipping a lot," he says.

"PUNCHING" WOOD

For flipping dense bushes or brush, Hallman changes to an offset EWG hook and fluorocarbon. He says his hookup ratio is nearly 100 percent with that combo.



Strike King Hack Attack Heavy Cover Flippin' Hook

Peter T's homemade flipping hook



5. WEIGHTS

You can pretty much brush aside lead, brass, steel and any other material other than tungsten for punching weights, at least among the pros. Its sensitivity, density and compact profile make it ideal, particularly when working with the heavy weights so often used for punching. A compact weight slides more easily through cover, and it won't "blow open" the fish's mouth as much as a larger weight tends to do during the hookset. Hallman suggests a Reins tungsten weight because it has a plastic insert to protect the line.



6. KNOTS

While some knots perform better with different styles of hooks, lines and techniques, the best choice often ultimately boils down to personal preference. However, both sources like a snell knot on straight-shank hooks because it causes the hook point to kick out and up on the hookset.

THE PARABOLIC TREND

Hallman punched his way to a \$100,000 victory at the 2016 FLW Tour event last February on Florida's Lake Okeechobee, but he didn't rely on a broomstick rod and bone-jarring hooksets to stick his fish.



PHOTO BY JOEY WHITE

Instead, he used an MHX FS966 extra-heavy flippin' rod from Mosley Rod Works. He says the specialty rod is designed with a parabolic bend that allows for a subtler hookset, better hookups and improved control over big bass in heavy cover when using 3/4 ounce and heavier weights.

"It's the rod I use strictly for punching," Hallman says. "The hookset I use punching is entirely different than what I'll use when flipping bushes. Flipping bushes I generally use smaller weights and throw slack at the fish before I really jack them on the hookset. If you do that with a big weight and braided line around thick grass you're going to blow their mouth open and miss lots of fish. I did it that way for years."

Hallman uses what he calls a "pull type" hookset with the Mosley rod.

"You initiate the hookset on a tight line instead of a slack one. The rod's parabolic bend keeps slack from getting in the line during the fight and helps prevent a big fish from throwing the hook when you're using a big weight."

ABOUT THOSE PEGS

Punchers frequently use a bobber stop (or two) above the weight to keep it snugged against the bait's head. This prevents separation on the fall and promotes better penetration. With weights larger than 3/4 ounce, some anglers prefer to use a bobber stop between the weight and the knot to help protect the knot.

However, Thliveros likes to punch without a peg whenever he can get away with it.

"There are some situations when you have to peg the bait, but there are definitely some advantages to not using one. Not using a peg frees up the bait and gives it more movement that might get you a few more bites," he says. ■





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NEW GEAR FOR BASS HEADS

By Colin Moore

Rebel Humpback

It looks like a Rebel Humpback, but will it fish like one? That's the question a lot of old-timers might be asking themselves as they ponder the purchase of the resurrected crankbait that everybody had to have back in the '60s when it was first introduced. The latest iteration of the famous shallow-runner is 1 3/4 inches long and is available in eight colors. \$5.99

rebellures.com

FixnZip

The FixnZip can be used to replace a malfunctioning zipper on articles of clothing that otherwise would probably wind up in the trash bin. The device is reusable and works on plastic or metal zippers equally well. Price is \$9.95 for one FixnZip slider with a ring pull tab and a cord pull tab; \$24.99 for three. It comes in three sizes.

fixnzip.com

EnerPlex Kickr IV

Put the sun to work when your mobile phone, tablet or GoPro runs short of battery power. The 6-watt, 5-volt Kickr IV is one of the new generation of portable solar chargers that puts the juice back into a device quickly. Unfold the Kickr IV to reveal four solar panels that convert sunlight into electric power and, when plugged in via the USB port, restore battery power at the same speed as a wall plug-in with 1.2 amps of output. The Kickr IV weighs less than a pound. \$75

goenerplex.com

Sven Can See Anti-Fog Spray Gel

Sven Can See was developed by a boat racer and snow skier as an alternative to having to wipe off the lenses of his glasses when he was on the water or on the slopes. The solution is available in various applicants, including a handy spray-on that, once applied, keeps lenses from fogging up no matter the season. \$10.95

svencansee.com

Suunto Traverse Alpha

The water-resistant Traverse Alpha wristwatch includes tools such as GPS, barometer, moon phase calendar, compass, altimeter, waypoint marker, storm alert, red backlight, and sunrise/sunset alerts and moonrise/moonset alerts. Two color options are available: black and grey-green. A USB battery charger cable that plugs into a computer, wall or car charger is provided. \$569

suunto.com/traversealpha

GillzMask

Designed for inshore fishermen and bass anglers, the GillzMask provides UPF 50+ protection and is tailored in a ventilated "saddle cut" design so that the fabric doesn't ride up on the neck as the wearer is moving around. There's also a mesh mouth opening that channels breath away from the eyes to reduce the likelihood of sunglass fogging. The mask is available in a dozen colors, and one size fits all. \$24.95

gillz-gear.com



REBEL HUMPBAC



FIXNZIP



ENERPLEX KICKR IV



SUUNTO TRAVERSE ALPHA

GILLZMASK



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OUR LIVES TAKES PLACE UNDER HARSH SUN.

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All of FLW's tournament circuits are represented, clockwise from top left: Costa FLW Series pro Russell Cecil of Willis, Texas; 2016 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League All-American champ Jeremy Lawyer of Sarcoux, Mo.; FLW College Fishing anglers Curtis Lilly and Taylor Schmitt of Mckendree University; High School Fishing anglers and brothers Tate and Eli Brummett of the Wagoner (Okla.) Bulldogs; and (center) FLW Tour pro Greg Bohannon of Rogers, Ark.

PHOTO BY D. W. REED II



2017 SEASON PREVIEW

Like a tournament morning, every new fishing season dawns ripe with potential. AOY points are zeroed. Championship fields wait to be filled. It's a fresh start. At FLW, the 2017 tournament season kicks off in mid-January with the first T-H Marine Bass Fishing League event at Lake Okeechobee. Then the season winds its way back and forth across the country – and even around the world – until the Costa FLW Series Championship wraps up in early November. In between, thousands of bass and millions of dollars will be tracked down by FLW members as the organization crowns its champions and the entire industry has a heck of a lot of fun. So whether your goal is to qualify for the All-American, earn a spot on Tour, learn the ropes as a co-angler or represent your school at the college or high school level, FLW has an opportunity for you to compete. Read on to learn more about what's in store for 2017.

– Curtis Niedermier, Editor-in-Chief

FORREST WOOD CUP



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

LAKE MURRAY

COLUMBIA, S.C.
AUG. 11-13

Hosted by Capital City/Lake Murray Country Regional Tourism Board

WHO'S IN

- 1: 2016 FLW Tour Angler of the Year
- 1: 2016 Forrest Wood Cup champion
- 2: Winners of two 2016 FLW Tour Invitationals
- 35: Top pros from the 2017 FLW Tour
- 11: Qualifiers from the 2016 Costa FLW Series Championship
- 1: 2017 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League All-American winner
- 1: 2017 FLW College Fishing National Championship Fish-Off winner
- 1: 2017 The Bass Federation National Championship winner

53: Total

JOIN FLW IN COLUMBIA

FLW will host its third Forrest Wood Cup championship event in Columbia, and as in the past, the excitement isn't limited to what happens on the water. Fans can enjoy lake-side activities such as FLW's morning takeoff show, electronics and boat demos, and more. Back in town, weigh-ins, which are held at Colonial Life Arena, will be preceded by the FLW Expo at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. The FLW Expo offers consumers their first chance to purchase new tackle released at the annual ICAST trade show. FLW pros and fishing celebrities will be on hand signing auto-graphs, and there are plenty of fun activities – and freebies – just for kids.

CUP PAYOUTS

Place	Prize
1	\$300,000
+ 2018 FWC entry	
2	\$60,000
3	\$50,000
4	\$37,500
5	\$30,000
6	\$24,000
7	\$23,000
8	\$22,000
9	\$21,000
10	\$20,000
11-20	\$15,000
21-53	\$10,000



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

WHAT TO EXPECT ON LAKE MURRAY

LAST TIME: Local favorite Anthony Gagliardi edged out Quaker State pro Scott Canterbury by a 1-ounce margin to win the 2014 Cup at Murray with a four-day total of 51 pounds, 2 ounces. Gagliardi primarily targeted schooling fish in the lower end of the lake. Other top patterns included junk-fishing wood cover and docks and fishing shallow topwater throughout the lake. Michael Bennett used a floating frog to win the 2008 Cup at Murray with a four-day total of 52-3.

CRITICAL FACTORS: Fishing pressure in key areas takes its toll quickly on Murray in the heat of summer, especially in the shallows. Bank runners will need plenty of water to fish, while the schooling bite typically is more reliable in multiple-day events.

TARGET AREAS: Bass will be caught throughout the lake on offshore structure, points, docks, emergent grass, wood cover and anywhere that baitfish congregate.

CATCH ESTIMATES: Consistency is the challenge in August, but expect the champ to weigh in average catches in the low to mid-teens. ■

FLW TOUR



The big news for the 2017 FLW Tour season is the series' expansion to a seven-event schedule, beginning with the opener at Lake Guntersville in February.

SCHEDULE

- 1 LAKE GUNTERSVILLE**
GUNTERSVILLE, ALA. FEB. 2-5
- 2 LAKE TRAVIS**
JONESTOWN, TEXAS FEB. 16-19
- 3 HARRIS CHAIN**
LEESBURG, FLA. MARCH 9-12
- 4 LAKE CUMBERLAND**
BURNSIDE, KY. APRIL 6-9
- 5 BEAVER LAKE**
ROGERS, ARK. APRIL 27-30
- 6 MISSISSIPPI RIVER**
LA CROSSE, WIS. MAY 18-21
- 7 POTOMAC RIVER**
MARBURY, MD. JUNE 15-18

TOURNAMENT FORMAT

- The entire field fishes on days one and two.
- The top 20 pros after two days based on cumulative weight advance to day three. A co-angler champion is crowned on day two, and only pros continue fishing.
- The top 10 pros after three days based on cumulative weight advance to day four.
- The winner is the pro with the heaviest four-day cumulative weight.

CUP QUALIFICATION

The top 35 pros in the point standings at season's end qualify for the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup.



PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

Scott Canterbury got his first Tour win at Beaver Lake in 2016.

PAYOUTS

PRO WINNERS – \$100,000 | **CO WINNERS** – \$20,000

— FLW pays out to the top 50 finishers in the pro and co-angler divisions —

AOY – \$100,000 plus 2018 Forrest Wood Cup berth

COY – Ranger Z518C with 200-hp outboard

RANGER CUP – The Ranger Cup payout at regular-season Tour events is \$25,000 to the winning pro and \$5,000 to the winning co-angler if they meet program guidelines. The top Ranger Cup pro in the standings at the end of the year wins a Ranger Z518C with a 200-hp outboard.

TOUR FACT

This season FLW will host its first-ever Tour events at Lake Cumberland and the Mississippi River near La Crosse.

EXPECT BIG WEIGHTS ON WEEK 1

Glenn Browne



Sure, Guntersville, Ala., could be quite cold still in early February, but the fishing in Lake Guntersville should be red hot. Past tournaments at Guntersville in the early part of the year have produced plenty of 20-plus-pound limits and individual bass approaching the 10-pound mark, and this one is likely to be no exception.

It should be a fantastic kickoff to the season. ■

COSTA FLW SERIES

The Costa FLW Series continues to expand via its International Division thanks to the recent addition of South Africa to the fold. Stateside, the FLW Series features five regional divisions and a no-entry-fee championship.



PHOTO BY JOEY WHITE

Pat Fisher won the 2016 Costa FLW Series crown and a spot at the 2017 Cup.

TOURNAMENT PAYOUTS



REGULAR-SEASON EVENTS

- Pro winner: \$40,000, plus a Ranger Z518C with 200-hp outboard if the winner is Ranger Cup qualified
- Co-angler winner: Ranger Z175 with 90-hp outboard, plus \$5,000 if the winner is Ranger Cup qualified

**Prizes increase if the field size surpasses 150.*

CHAMPIONSHIP PAYDAY

- Prizes and Ranger Cup bonuses for the Costa FLW Series Championship are similar to those in regular-season events, except the winning pro earns \$50,000 cash, and payouts are increased throughout the top 40.

STRIKE KING AOY & COY PAYOUTS

- AOY: \$2,000 prize package, including deposits for the 2018 season
- COY: \$800 prize package, including deposits for the 2018 season

The Lucky 11

Eleven pros will qualify for the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup via the 2017 Costa FLW Series Championship. Determining the qualifiers follows a two-step process:

1. The first six invites are reserved for the highest-finishing pro from each of the five U.S. FLW Series divisions and the FLW Series International Division at the championship.
2. The remaining five invitations go to the top five pros in the championship standings not already selected in step 1.



A QUICK LOOK AT THE CHAMPIONSHIP

LOCATION: Kentucky Lake, Paris, Tenn.

DATE: Nov. 2–4

LAST TIME: Dan Morehead won the 2011 Costa FLW Series Championship out of Paris with a four-day total of 61 pounds, 4 ounces. He did most of his damage with an umbrella rig.

CRITICAL FACTORS: The lake is drawn down in the fall, which scatters baitfish and bass. Grass is often good, but growth was poor in 2016. That bite could turn on again if the grass recovers this year. Finally, big winds and nasty cold fronts can stir up the 160,000-acre lake overnight. A back-up plan for a cold front can be worth a fortune.

TARGET AREAS: Bass will be caught on transition areas, including shallow bars in the mouths of creeks, shallow main-lake ledges, secondary points and flats in the creeks. The best spots house schools of baitfish.

CATCH ESTIMATES: Daily limits in the mid- to upper teens would put a pro in contention to win.



Kentucky Lake near Paris, Tenn.

PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ

CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFICATION

Slots in the championship are reserved for the top 40 professionals and top 40 co-anglers from each of the five U.S. FLW Series divisions, plus two pros and two co-anglers each from FLW Canada, FLW China, FLW Mexico, FLW South Africa and FLW South Korea.

Record Fields and Payouts

Some folks refer to the Costa FLW Series as FLW's AAA division. For those in the know, however, that's not exactly the case. The FLW Series is the stomping grounds for some of the best regional anglers and full-time pros in the game. And in the last few seasons, the payouts have rivaled those of the top-level professional tours.

In 2015, FLW paid out \$417,000 at the season-opener on Lake Okeechobee, which featured a 250-boat max field. That was a record for the FLW Series. Then in 2016, with a reformatted payout structure, the Okeechobee opener – also with a 250-boat max field – paid out \$461,050 to establish a new benchmark. Jason Lambert, the 2016 winner at Okeechobee, earned \$60,000 cash plus a Ranger Z518C with 200-hp outboard for a total prize package worth \$105,000.



Jason Lambert cashed in at Okeechobee in 2016, earning a prize pack worth \$105,000.

SCHEDULE

CENTRAL DIVISION

March 30-April 1

Lake Dardanelle, Russellville, Ark.

June 8-10

Kentucky Lake, Gilbertsville, Ky.

Oct. 12-14

Lake of the Ozarks, Osage Beach, Mo.

NORTHERN DIVISION

June 22-24

Lake Champlain, Plattsburgh, N.Y.

July 27-29

1,000 Islands, Clayton, N.Y.

Aug. 24-26

Potomac River, Marbury, Md.

SOUTHEASTERN DIVISION

Jan. 26-28

Lake Okeechobee, Clewiston, Fla.

March 2-4

Lake Seminole, Bainbridge, Ga.

May 4-6

Lake Chickamauga, Dayton, Tenn.

SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION

Feb. 23-25

Sam Rayburn, Brookeland, Texas

April 20-22

Grand Lake, Grove, Okla.

Sept. 21-23

Lake Texoma, Pottsboro, Texas

WESTERN DIVISION

Feb. 9-11

Lake Havasu, Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

May 11-13

California Delta, Bethel Island, Calif.

Sept. 28-30

Clear Lake, Lakeport, Calif.

COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP

Nov. 2-4

Kentucky Lake, Paris, Tenn.

TOURNAMENT FORMAT

The entire field fishes on days one and two.

The top 10 pros and co-anglers after two days based on cumulative weight advance to day three.

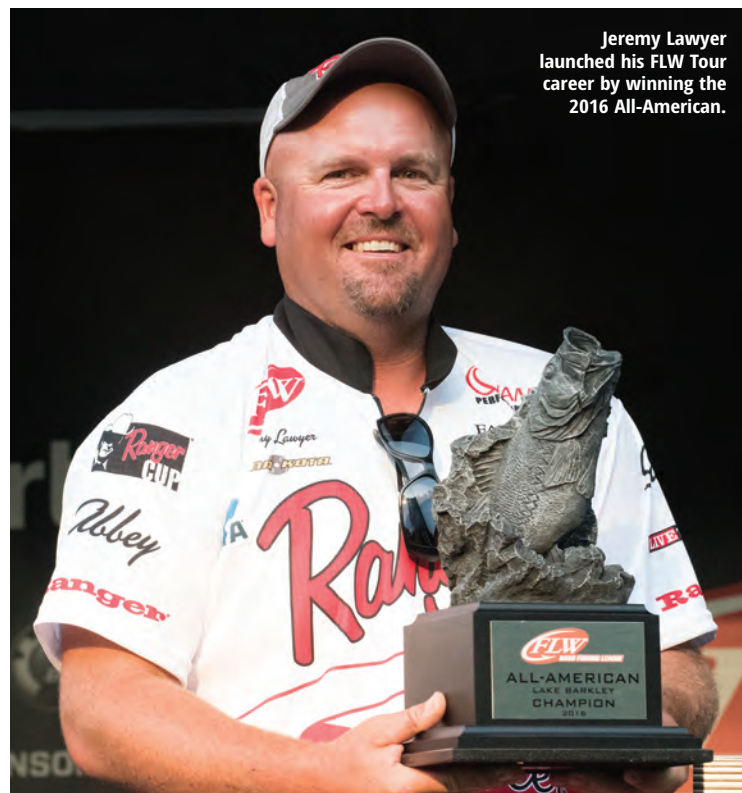
Pro and co-angler winners are determined based on heaviest three-day cumulative weight. ■

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

T-H MARINE BASS FISHING LEAGUE

The T-H Marine Bass Fishing League will again include 24 divisions spread out across the country, with a series of qualifying steps that leads to the All-American championship and a shot at the Forrest Wood Cup.

The postseason schedule is listed here. To view the entire 2017 BFL schedule, visit FLWFishing.com, or check out the December 2016 issue of *FLW Bass Fishing* magazine.



Jeremy Lawyer launched his FLW Tour career by winning the 2016 All-American.

PHOTO BY KORY SARGE

WIN AND YOU'RE IN

You're never out of the running to make the All-American with the all-new "Win and You're In" format of the T-H Marine Bass Fishing League. If you win a regular-season qualifying event as a boater or co-angler, no matter where you stand in the season-long rankings, you automatically qualify for that division's Regional and the chance to make the All-American. The only stipulation is that you have to have entered all five events in a division and fished at least two to earn the Regional slot. The remainder of the Regional field is comprised of the top 45 boaters and co-anglers from each division's point standings. Regional competition is divided up into six events.

REGIONAL

SCHEDULE

- 1 KENTUCKY LAKE**
GILBERTSVILLE, KY. **OCT. 5-7**
Divisions: Hoosier, Illini, Mountain, Ozark
- 2 BARREN RIVER**
SCOTTSVILLE, KY. **OCT. 12-14**
Divisions: Buckeye, Great Lakes, LBL, Michigan
- 3 WHEELER LAKE**
DECATUR, ALA. **OCT. 12-14**
Divisions: Bama, Bulldog, Choo Choo, Music City
- 4 CHICKAHOMINY RIVER**
WILLIAMSBURG, VA. **OCT. 12-14**
Divisions: North Carolina, Northeast, Piedmont, Volunteer
- 5 RED RIVER**
BOSSIER CITY, LA. **OCT. 19-21**
Divisions: Arkie, Cowboy, Mississippi, Okie
- 6 LAKE LANIER**
GAINESVILLE, GA. **OCT. 19-21**
Divisions: Gator, Savannah River, Shenandoah, South Carolina
- 7 WILD CARD**
TBD **OCT. 27-28**

ALL-AMERICAN

PICKWICK LAKE, FLORENCE, ALA.
MAY 31-JUNE 3



Pickwick Lake

PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

120: TOTAL NUMBER OF QUALIFYING EVENTS ACROSS 24 BFL DIVISIONS

WELCOME T-H MARINE



In October 2016, FLW agreed to a partnership with T-H Marine to make the Alabama-based boating accessories manufacturer the presenting sponsor of the Bass Fishing League. FLW is proud to welcome T-H Marine to its most popular tournament circuit of all time.



PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

AOY and COY

The Angler of the Year and Co-angler of the Year from each division earn \$1,000 and \$500, respectively.

POTENTIAL WINNING PRIZES

ONE-DAY QUALIFIERS*

Boater: \$8,000 and Regional qualification
Co-angler: \$3,000 and Regional qualification

TWO-DAY SUPER TOURNAMENTS*

Boater: \$11,000 and Regional qualification
Co-angler: \$4,500 and Regional qualification

REGIONALS**

Boater: \$20,000 and Ranger Z518C with 200-hp outboard
Co-angler: Ranger Z518C with 200-hp outboard

ALL-AMERICAN

Boater: \$120,000 and Forrest Wood Cup berth
Co-angler: \$60,000

**Qualifying event top prizes based on field size and Ranger Cup contingency eligibility. Payouts extend to the top 20 percent of the finishers.*

***Winning prizes guaranteed at Regionals.*



How Super Tournaments Work:

Entry fees and payouts are increased for these regular-season finale events – one in each division. The entire field fishes on day one, with the top 20 percent continuing on day two.

How the Wild Card Works:

Anyone who enters all five tournaments in a division, fishes at least two, but fails to make a Regional can fish the Wild Card. It's a two-day tournament with the full field fishing both days. The no-entry-fee event pays out no prize money, but awards All-American slots to the top six boaters and co-anglers.

How Regionals Work:

The top anglers from the 24 BFL divisions are grouped together into four-division Regionals for three-day, no-entry-fee tournaments. Everyone fishes days one and two, with the top 12 advancing to the third day.

How the All-American Works:

The top six finishers at the Regionals and the Wild Card, plus seven from the TBF, compete in the three-day, no-entry-fee championship. Everyone fishes days one and two, with the top 10 advancing to the third day. The winner makes the Forrest Wood Cup. ■

FLW COLLEGE FISHING



FLW College Fishing competition is broken down into five conferences, with a National Championship and FLW's third annual College Fishing Open.

Still Free to Fish

As it has been since its inception in 2009, FLW College Fishing is a no-entry-fee tournament circuit for eligible anglers who are full-time college students in an FLW-affiliated college or university fishing club.

PAYOUTS

Place	Prize
1	\$2,000
2	\$1,000
3	\$500
4	\$500
5	\$500



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFICATION

There are two routes to qualify to the 2018 FLW College Fishing National Championship during the 2017 season.

1. The top 10 teams advance from each qualifier. One additional team advances for every 10 teams beyond 100 competing in an event.
2. The top 20 teams at the FLW College Fishing Open. One additional team advances for every 10 teams beyond 200 competing.



College Fishing has soared to include more than 700 clubs.

PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMAYER

Setting Up a Record-Setting Open

Though FLW doesn't currently hold the record for the largest collegiate bass fishing event in history, we're working on taking back that title at the third annual FLW College Fishing Open on Kentucky Lake in April.

The first two Opens attracted fields of 194 (2015) and 203 (2016) teams. The latter was a record at the time. ■

SCHEDULE

FLW COLLEGE FISHING OPEN

April 7-8
Kentucky/Barkley Lakes, Gilbertsville, Ky.

CENTRAL CONFERENCE

April 1
Lake of the Ozarks, Osage Beach, Mo.
May 20
Kentucky/Barkley Lakes, Gilbertsville, Ky.
Oct. 7
Mississippi River, Prairie Du Chien, Wis.

NORTHERN CONFERENCE

April 29
Smith Mountain Lake, Huddleston, Va.
July 22
Chautauqua Lake, Bemus Point, N.Y.
Sept. 9
Lake Erie, Sandusky, Ohio

SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE

Jan. 14
Lake Seminole, Bainbridge, Ga.
Feb. 25
Lake Guntersville, Guntersville, Ala.
March 18
Lake Hartwell, Hartwell, Ga.

SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

Feb. 4
Sam Rayburn, Zavalla, Texas
May 6
Fort Gibson Lake, Wagoner, Okla.
Sept. 23
Red River, Bossier City, La.

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Feb. 11
Lake Havasu, Lake Havasu City, Ariz.
May 13
California Delta, Bethel Island, Calif.
Sept. 30
Clear Lake, Lakeport, Calif.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

May 31-June 2
Wheeler Lake, Rogersville, Ala.

FORREST WOOD CUP FISH-OFF

June 3
Wilson Lake, Florence, Ala.

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HIGH SCHOOL FISHING



No other FLW tournament circuit has as much growth potential as High School Fishing, and it's about to go through a growth spurt in 2017. FLW recently announced an expansion effort, in collaboration with The Bass Federation, to increase the number of HSF tournaments from 58 to 76 this season.

COMPETITION BREAKDOWN

FLW HSF OPENS – 20

TBF HSF CHALLENGES – 2

OPEN/STATE CHAMPIONSHIP
DUAL EVENTS – 4

STANDALONE STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS – 39

HSF WORLD FINALS/
NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – 1

SANCTIONED HIGH SCHOOL EVENTS – 10*

TOTAL EVENTS – 76

**FLW and TBF are operating these events in conjunction with the Illinois High School Association, Kentucky High School Athletic Association and Georgia Independent Christian Athletic Association as official varsity sporting events in those respective states.*

HSF OPEN & CHALLENGE SCHEDULE

Jan. 15	Lake Okeechobee Challenge	Lake Okeechobee
Feb. 19	Lake Hartwell Early Bird Challenge	Lake Hartwell
March 4	South Carolina Open	Lake Murray
March 11	Mississippi Open	Columbus Pool
March 25	Arkansas Open	Lake Hamilton
April 1	Texas Open	Lake of the Pines
April 22	Alabama Open	Logan Martin
April 29	North Carolina Open	High Rock Lake
May 6	Wisconsin Open & Iowa State Championship	Mississippi River
May 13	Missouri Open	Truman Reservoir
May 14	California Open & State Championship	California Delta
May 20	Virginia Open & State Championship	Claytor Lake
June 3	Minnesota Open	Mississippi River
June 10	Michigan Open & State Championship	Detroit River
Sept. 9	Louisiana Open	Ouachita River
Sept. 16	Maryland Open	Potomac River
Sept. 23	Pennsylvania Open	Raystown Lake
Sept. 30	Indiana Open	Lake Monroe
Oct. 7	Illinois Open	Lake Springfield
Oct. 14	New York Open	Lake Oneida
Oct. 21	Oklahoma Open	Grand Lake
Oct. 28	Ohio Open	Caesar Creek
Nov. 4	Kentucky Open	Lake Cumberland
Nov. 18	Tennessee Open	Norris Lake
Dec. 2	Georgia Open	Lake Lanier
Dec. 9	Florida Open	St. Johns River

WORLD FINALS/ NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

PICKWICK LAKE, FLORENCE, ALA.
JUNE 27-JULY 1

CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFICATION

Registration in High School Fishing Opens, State Championships and Challenges is open to all high school anglers who are Student Angler Federation members (sign up at highschoolfishing.com). Students can qualify for the National Championship through the Opens, State Championships, Challenges and even through other select high school tournament trails, such as the Southeast Texas (SETX) High School Fishing Association, Texas High School Bass Association, Northwest Georgia High School Anglers Association, Georgia High School Fishing and Faith Angler Network (FAN) High School Fishing.

Participating in a High School Fishing tournament begins with a visit to highschoolfishing.org for entry information.



PHOTO BY DAN JOHNSON

FACT: High School Fishing participation surpassed 15,000 students in 2016. That is impressive for a program that started in 2010 with the first High School Fishing World Finals followed by a series of state championships in 2011, and FLW anticipates the participation to increase by at least 5,000 in 2017.

HSF STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Jan. 29	Texas State Championship	Sam Rayburn Reservoir
Feb. 11	Georgia State Championship	West Point Lake
Feb. 26	Florida State Championship	St. Johns River
March 25	Louisiana State Championship	Cross Lake
April 1	Kentucky State Championship	Lake Cumberland
April 1	Mississippi State Championship	Tenn-Tom Waterway
April 2	Illinois State Championship	Clinton Lake
April 9	North Carolina State Championship	Kerr Lake
April 9	Missouri State Championship	Table Rock Lake
April 29	South Carolina State Championship	Lake Murray
May 6	Ohio State Championship	Alum Creek
May 7	Arkansas State Championship	Lake Dardanelle
May 7	Idaho State Championship	CJ Strike Reservoir
May 7	Tennessee State Championship	Norris Lake
May 20	Arizona State Championship	Lake Pleasant
May 21	Alabama State Championship	Lake Neely Henry
June 3	Indiana State Championship	Brookville Lake
June 3	Massachusetts, Rhode Island & Connecticut Tri State Championship	Mashapaug Pond
June 11	Colorado & New Mexico Dual State Championship	Pueblo Reservoir
July 8	Wisconsin State Championship	Lake Winnebago
July 9	Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland & New Jersey Quad State Championship	Chesapeake Bay
July 15	New York State Championship	Mohawk River
July 15	South Dakota State Championship	Lake Cochrane
July 16	Minnesota State Championship	Mille Lacs Lake
July 16	Ontario Province Championship	Georgian Bay
July 22	Nebraska State Championship	Merritt Reservoir
Aug. 13	Washington State Championship	Potholes Reservoir



PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

TOURNAMENT FORMAT

High School Fishing events are team events, just as in College Fishing, but each team is paired with an adult boat driver who supervises. The students do all the fishing and weigh in a shared weight.

What's Next

FLW's plans to expand outdoor recreation and competition don't end at the high school level. The FLW Foundation also hosts youth fishing events and other youth outreach opportunities at FLW tournaments around the country, and plans are under way to expand tournament opportunities and start clubs for middle school and elementary students. FLW and TBF are committed to introducing bass fishing and the outdoors to people of all ages.

JOIN THE CLUB

High School Fishing is cooperatively managed by FLW and TBF. To participate, students must be Student Angler Federation members. SAF membership includes both TBF and FLW membership for just \$25 per year plus a digital subscription to FLW Bass Fishing magazine, online training courses and more. SAF members never pay an entry fee to participate in FLW or TBF High

School Fishing tournaments, and all clubs are covered by SAF insurance, which means there is no added expense for schools with sanctioned High School Fishing clubs.

FLW and TBF's goal is to organize and promote tournament-fishing opportunities for high-school aged students, but the objectives go beyond just competition. The organizations aim to connect youth to their

natural resources and promote education, conservation and an active lifestyle. Relating science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learned in the classroom to fishing and outdoor activities is a key objective of the program.

Students can join SAF and enter High School Fishing tournaments by going to highschoolfishing.com and flwfishing.com. ■

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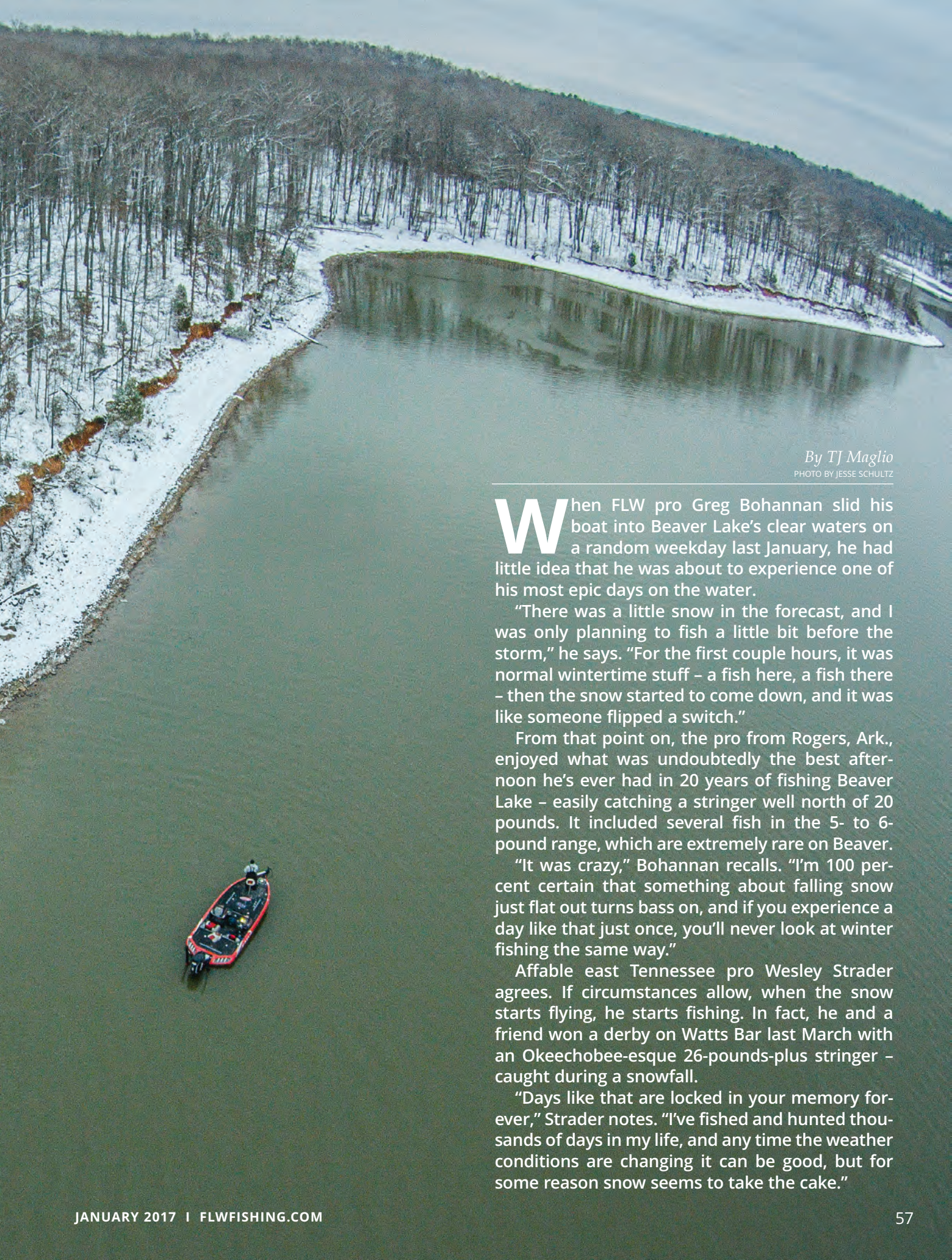
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IT'S SNOWING? WE'RE DEFINITELY GOING!

Falling snow rings the dinner bell for winter bass



By TJ Maglio

PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ

When FLW pro Greg Bohannon slid his boat into Beaver Lake's clear waters on a random weekday last January, he had little idea that he was about to experience one of his most epic days on the water.

"There was a little snow in the forecast, and I was only planning to fish a little bit before the storm," he says. "For the first couple hours, it was normal wintertime stuff – a fish here, a fish there – then the snow started to come down, and it was like someone flipped a switch."

From that point on, the pro from Rogers, Ark., enjoyed what was undoubtedly the best afternoon he's ever had in 20 years of fishing Beaver Lake – easily catching a stringer well north of 20 pounds. It included several fish in the 5- to 6-pound range, which are extremely rare on Beaver.

"It was crazy," Bohannon recalls. "I'm 100 percent certain that something about falling snow just flat out turns bass on, and if you experience a day like that just once, you'll never look at winter fishing the same way."

Affable east Tennessee pro Wesley Strader agrees. If circumstances allow, when the snow starts flying, he starts fishing. In fact, he and a friend won a derby on Watts Bar last March with an Okeechobee-esque 26-pounds-plus stringer – caught during a snowfall.

"Days like that are locked in your memory forever," Strader notes. "I've fished and hunted thousands of days in my life, and any time the weather conditions are changing it can be good, but for some reason snow seems to take the cake."

Why Snow?

Although there haven't been any detailed studies supporting the notion that bass feeding activity increases during a snowfall, Strader's theory revolves around light penetration.

"If you've ever been outside during a snowfall during the day, particularly in the South, you'll notice that the sky turns a really weird color," Strader observes. "It's overcast, but it's actually still fairly bright out. Bass down here don't see that very often, and maybe it triggers them to feed. It's dark enough that they don't get spooked by the sun, but not so dark that they can't see to feed."

To Bohannon, the bass are doing what just about all predators do when they sense a storm coming – feeding.

"Animals can sense an approaching storm, whether by feeling the barometric pressure dropping, or some other instinctive trigger. They know that they're probably going to be pretty uncomfortable for the next couple days, and they want to feed while the feeding's good."

— Greg Bohannon

"You see it in just about every outdoor pursuit, whether in the woods or on the water," he adds. "Animals can sense an approaching storm, whether by feeling the barometric pressure dropping, or some other instinctive trigger. They know that they're probably going to be pretty uncomfortable for the next couple days, and they want to feed while the feeding's good."

Get out There

When the snowflakes do start falling, Bohannon and Strader agree that the biggest key to unlocking the bite is to shift gears and cover lots of water.

"In the wintertime, I'm normally fishing something slow, like a jerkbait or a grub," Bohannon says. "Once I see snow start coming down, though, I'm going to pick up something I can chuck and wind – maybe a spinnerbait or crankbait – and get just a little bit more aggressive."

There's an expression some anglers use to describe a typical summer fishing process: "fishing fast, slowly." It means working a bait quickly, but being extremely thorough and deliberate about each presentation. Fishing in the snow calls for the opposite approach, something akin to "fishing slowly, fast."

To Strader, that means working a spinnerbait or crankbait in a number of areas and rotating through them quickly, though he's still fishing the bait in a manner that's typically productive in cold water.

"You're not going to start catching them all of a sudden by burning a spinnerbait, or speed-cranking through your areas. You're still methodically fishing like you would in the winter; you just hit lots of spots and stick to the moving baits because the bass are more aggressive."

Find the Rocks

Rocks become especially attractive to bass in the winter because they hold tons of forage. Consequently, both Bohannon and Strader focus most of their "snow day" efforts finding and fishing a variety of rocky structures.

"In the Ozarks, you've got rock in just about every form imaginable," Bohannon explains. "When it's snowing, though, I focus on finding transition banks that tend to be a little flatter. Places where a bluff tapers to a flat, the



PHOTO BY CHRIS BURGAN

Bohannon says to switch from slow-moving baits to something faster – a crankbait or spinnerbait – when the snow falls.



Strader says the same rocks that attract bass on “normal” winter days will produce during a snowfall, but an angler’s approach must change.

shallow side of channel swings, pea gravel points – anywhere in the depth range of 3 to 8 feet. I think the snow brings them up a little shallower as well, so I fish as much of that kind of stuff as I can.”

The “snow bite” isn’t restricted to one area of a lake, but rather might extend all the way from the dam to the riverine feeders.

“I’ve caught them in the snow from one end of a lake to another around here,” Strader says of eastern Tennessee fisheries. “You’re not going to really be doing anything dramatically different from what you would any other day on the water that time of year. You’re just tweaking it a little bit, and you’ve got a lot better chance of wrecking them.”

The bottom line is that far too many anglers put their boats away each fall and miss out on one of the most underexploited bites of the cold-water season. Better for a fisherman to keep his boat ready for action and, when the forecast calls for some flurries, be prepared to schedule his own “snow day.” ■

How Barometric Pressure Affects Bass

Because barometric pressure is one of many environmental factors at play in a fishery, it’s difficult to understand how bass react to pressure changes with any level of certainty. Studies focusing on barometric pressure have returned mostly inconclusive results, despite what countless anglers have experienced.

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Biologist Paul Rister has made a career studying bass behavior, and provides some insight into how the barometer affects fish behavior.

“Think of barometric pressure as a big hand pressing down on the earth,” he says. “When the pressure is high, that hand is pushing down harder. When the pressure drops, the hand relaxes.”

“This pressure could easily impact the aquatic environment and cause fish to be less comfortable when it’s high, which could explain the tough bite many anglers experience under ‘high skies.’ By that same logic, falling barometric pressure may increase feeding activity because bass and other species feel more comfortable and are more willing to interact.”

“You’re not going to start catching them all of a sudden by burning a spinnerbait, or speed-cranking through your areas. You’re still methodically fishing like you would in the winter; you just hit lots of spots and stick to the moving baits because the bass are more aggressive.”

— Wesley Strader



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FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

ON TOUR



What's Inside:
**HOW PAT FISHER RE-LAUNCHED
HIS CAREER WITH A COSTA FLW
SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP WIN**

2016 T-H Marine BFL
Regional recaps

Meet the 2017 All-American
qualifiers

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

JANUARY 2017 FLWFISHING.COM



DETAILS

Nov. 3-5, 2016

Presented by Costa

Hosted by ExploreBranson.com



FISHER'S RETURN TO FORM

GEORGIA ANGLER GOES UP A CREEK TO WIN COSTA TITLE AT TABLE ROCK

By Jody White

The Costa FLW Series Championship somehow always seems to produce something special. Set in the fall at the end of the tournament season, the annual event is usually accompanied by some storyline or technique that bubbles to the top at a time when most anglers are more concerned with getting in the woods or watching football.

In 2011, Dan Morehead won on Kentucky Lake and

showed off the Alabama Rig for the second time ever. In 2014, Zack Birge capped off a campaign in which he qualified for the FLW Tour with a season-ending win on Wheeler Lake. The next year, he tore through the competition with one of the best rookie Tour campaigns to date. A year later, out of Paducah, Ky., Ray Hanselman made it four wins in a row, and he and the rest of the top 10 finishers showed off the Tennessee River below

Kentucky Dam as a surprisingly productive smallmouth fishery.

In 2016, on Table Rock Lake, Pat Fisher finished his first season of upper-level FLW competition since 2008 with a win. And the familiar type of river strategy that has become so common during the Forrest Wood Cup in late summer reigned again in the November Costa FLW Series Championship.

Fisher's Return

In the fall of 2008, Pat Fisher lost his sponsor team deal on the FLW Tour and backed off from fishing as a pro, unable to finance the next season on his own. Fishing T-H Marine Bass Fishing League events for the next several years, Fisher made a few good runs at qualifying for the BFL All-American, but never actually returned to regular multi-day competition until this year at the Costa FLW Series level. Helped out by a sponsorship from Paul Davis, a company that specializes in home restoration, the Georgia angler got back in it with a bang.

"I didn't have enough money for entry fees or another backup sponsor that could put up that kind of money," says Fisher of his exit from pro fishing. "We lost everything; lost the house, didn't have a job. I went from making \$120,000 a year to \$15 an hour. There was a lot of soul searching."

Fisher is now on much more solid footing. He's married, raising three boys and owns his own roofing company. Even so, he wasn't prepared to step back out into major events without heavy sponsorship. He had fished under financial stress before, and the former Tour winner didn't want to do so again. When sponsorship took care of that side of things, Fisher went on to one of the best seasons of his career.

Fishing the Southeastern Division, Fisher finished ninth out of 250 boats to start the season at Okeechobee. At Santee Cooper, he finished second and would have won had Bryan Thrift not brought in a 30-pound bag the final day. At Wheeler Lake, Fisher finished 54th and punched his ticket to the championship by finishing fourth in the season-long standings for the division. At the championship, Fisher qualified for the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup on Lake Murray and what will be his fourth chance at FLW's biggest title.

"There wasn't any pressure that I had to make a check," says Fisher. "I had a job. I had my life taken care of. I've done it before, but I enjoyed it this time. There was no pressure."

Fisher isn't yet prepared to launch into Tour-level competition again, but he's



PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

After eight years away from multi-day tournament fishing, Pat Fisher fought his way to a major championship victory at Table Rock.

CONDITIONS

Weather | unusually warm in practice, followed by cooler weather during the event; foggy and overcast on day two; mostly sunny days one and three

Air Temperature | highs in the upper 60s or low 70s; lows in the upper 40s or low 50s

Water Temperature | upper 60s

Moon Phase | new

Predominant Lake Features | current-driven tributaries, standing timber, laydowns, rocky points, bluffs, chunk rock



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

TOP FIVE

NAME	HOMETOWN	WEIGHT	FISH	WINNINGS
1. PAT FISHER	COLBERT, GA	40-04	15	\$50,000
2. CODY BIRD	GRANBURY, TX	38-11	15	\$25,000
3. ZACK BIRGE	BLANCHARD, OK	36-14	15	\$20,000
4. GREG BOHANNAN	BENTONVILLE, AR	33-01	15	\$15,000
5. CHRISTOPHER JONES	BOKOSHE, OK	31-07	14	\$10,000



Fisher used a buzzbait and shaky head to catch a mixed bag of largemouths and smallmouths.

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

sure enough looking forward to competing in the Forrest Wood Cup on Lake Murray. He won there in 2000 as a co-angler and lives just three hours from the lake. With his background in Southeastern fishing and ample time to prepare, Fisher might well be a threat come August.

The River Pattern

When the going gets tough, the tough go up rivers. Though it's not quite a universally accepted fact yet, between the winning patterns on Table Rock and several recent Forrest Wood Cups won up creeks, a lot more bass anglers will probably be going to

extremes next summer. In all, five of the top 10 pros at Table Rock fished well up either the Kings River or the James River, and feisty river smallmouths played a big part for Fisher, Cody Bird (second) and Zack Birge (third).

Though none of the locals capitalized on a river pattern, Missourian James Watson did predict that it'd be a player.

"I said for the first time in years the rivers would be players, and I couldn't have been more right," says Watson. "But I honestly did not believe it would be winning material."

With the water low and hot in the main lake and summery air temperatures lingering throughout October and early November, the fishing was pretty bad. According to Watson, it would have taken between 45 and 48 pounds to win the championship in a normal year at Table Rock, not the 40-4 that Fisher weighed in over three days.

"The reason it [the river bite] played was the low water conditions and the lack of big gizzard shad in the main lake coming to the bank," says Watson. "In that case, the only natural thing to do is to search out your creeks. Nowhere, in all my time spent on Table Rock Lake, would I have expected so many brown fish to be caught. But if you're floating the Kings or the James your odds of catching a smallmouth bass are just as good as catching a largemouth. And that's what this was. It wasn't a bass boat tournament; it was a creek fishing tournament."

In particular, the action went down either far up the Kings River or far up the James. The Kings contingent was comprised of Bird, Chris Jones (fifth) and Travis Fox (sixth). Birge spent some time in the Kings, but by and large he joined Fisher up the James.

One reason that Fisher had such success in the James was that there were

2017 Forrest Wood Cup Qualifiers

Eleven pros earned berths in the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup via the 2016 Costa FLW Series Championship.

The qualifying spots were awarded in the following order: (1) The top angler from each of the five U.S. Costa FLW Series divisions and the top finisher from the International Division earned berths. (2) The next five highest-finishing anglers regardless of division in the overall results also received Cup berths.

Here are the qualifiers (numbers indicate finish at the championship):

Southeastern:
1. PAT FISHER
Colbert, Ga.

Southwestern:
2. CODY BIRD
Granbury, Texas

Central:
4. GREG BOHANNAN
Rogers, Ark.

Northern:
11. JOEL RICHARDSON
Kernersville, N.C.

Western:
29. ROY HAWK
Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

International:
51. HYOCHUL KIM
Korea

Next 5 Highest Finishers:
3. ZACK BIRGE
Blanchard, Okla.
5. CHRISTOPHER JONES
Bokoshe, Okla.
6. TRAVIS FOX
Rogers, Ark.
7. JEREMY LAWYER
Sarcoxi, Mo.
8. BRADFORD BEAVERS
Ridgeville, S.C.

thousands of gizzard shad in his area. While he mostly picked away at isolated trees with a shaky head or tossed a buzzbait along a rocky bank, Fisher also located a shoal with clearly visible current rolling over it at the head of his waters. There, he had spotted thousands of gizzard shad flitting over the shallow bar.

It's clear that Fisher wouldn't have won without the nearly 6-pound largemouth he caught on a buzzbait on day one, but it's equally obvious that he needed the cooperation of the smallmouths as well. On the final day, when Birge (the leader going into the final day) had tapped out the far upper section of the James (at and above the gizzard shad shoal), Fisher plucked multiple 3-pound-plus smallmouths from the trees with a shaky head, and they provided the winning margin.

The Kings River

Though the Kings River produced plenty of weight, it didn't quite hold up over the long haul, perhaps because

SHEPPARD WINS CO-ANGLER TITLE

Tyler Sheppard of Hermitage, Pa., led wire-to-wire and locked down the co-angler win in the 2016 Costa FLW Series Championship at Table Rock Lake. Sheppard's total of 23-10 was enough to earn the Northern Division Co-angler of the Year a new Ranger boat and his first individual win with FLW.

Sheppard fished with David Mansue, Jim Dillard and Zack Birge. He sacked up a stunning 12 pounds, 10 ounces on the first day and then ground out the win with 3-9 on day two and 7-7 on the final day.

"The first few days I caught them on an Alabama Rig," says Sheppard. "I also caught them on a shaky head a little bit and flipping a finesse worm. On day three I pretty much caught them all on a jig, and I caught one that helped on a finesse worm."

Sheppard's jig of choice was a 1/4-ounce Missile Jigs Mini Flip Jig trailered with a Strike King Menace Grub.



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

there was more pressure on it. With three anglers fishing in it (in part because a number of pros had caught fish there in practice), nobody had the juice to overcome Fisher. Even so, the Kings did result in perhaps the most interesting pattern of the tournament.

To clinch second, Bird caught a mixed bag of smallmouths and largemouths, but instead of bugging the bass with a buzzbait or fishing

slowly with a shaky head, Bird cranked.

"There were a lot of smallmouths in there, and they wanted it as fast as I could burn it," says Bird of his cranking approach up the Kings. "I'd usually hit the wood, and that would get them to chase it, and they would follow it out to the boat."

On the final day, while cranking laydowns scattered on the flats and the bank, Bird estimates that he caught

three limits of smallmouths, but never the kicker green bass that might have put him over the top.

In all, the Championship was a quality end to the season. It was hard-fought in the rivers, but that wasn't the only thing going (Greg Bohannon, who finished fourth, mounted a final-day charge in the lake). On the whole, it was made more special by yet another tense final weigh-in and a worthy champion. ■

KOREAN ANGLER WINS FIRST INTERNATIONAL DIVISION CUP BERTH

By Curtis Niedermier

"The first true world championship of bass fishing" is how FLW is describing its 2017 Forrest Wood Cup at Lake Murray. It's an accurate depiction now that FLW's International Division of the Costa FLW Series has produced its first-ever Forrest Wood Cup qualifier.

Korean angler Hyochul Kim finished in 51st place at the 2016 Costa FLW Series Championship at Table Rock Lake, ending up as the highest-finishing pro from the International Division, which earned him a slot at the Cup in August.

When the final International results were announced on day two at Table Rock (no International Division anglers made the day-three cut), Kim's reception from the assemblage of Korean media that had traveled to Missouri to film the event nearly rivaled the applause and cheers that tournament winner Pat Fisher received the following evening at the last weigh-in. It was a special moment for a country with a strong interest in tournament bass fishing.

"To be able to compete in U.S. pro league is the dream of all Korean pro anglers," says Kim, who lives in Seoul with his wife and son. "I had many calls from other pro anglers on my achievements from the U.S. Not only me, but all Korean pro anglers were touched when we heard the Korean national anthem played."

A 20-year veteran of tournament bass fishing, Kim says he's proud to carry not only the Korean flag, but also the banner of all International Division anglers this summer at Lake Murray.

"I am very excited to have an opportunity to compete with the best pros in the Forrest Wood Cup," says Kim. "Of course, winning the title [is my goal], but I know it is very difficult due to my distance to where it will be held. Practicing at Lake Murray won't be possible for me for now."



PHOTO BY CURTIS NIEDERMIER

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DETAILS

Sept. 29-Oct. 1, 2016

Presented by Mercury

Hosted by Rhea Economic & Tourism Council

Divisions: Arkie, Hoosier, LBL, Mountain



DAVIDSON DOMINATES AT LAKE CHICKAMAUGA

GRASS BITE KEY IN TOUGH AUTUMN TOURNAMENT

By Richard Simms

Ryan Davidson was all smiles as he walked to the weigh-in stand on the final day of the 2016 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Regional presented by Mercury on Lake Chickamauga.

Dusty Huggins, who hails from Russellville, Ark., was sitting in the leader's seat at the time, but based on the heft of Davidson's bag of bass, it was clear he was going to replace Huggins on the throne. Sure enough, Davidson's day-three bag boosted his tournament catch to 46 pounds, 14

ounces – putting him nearly 12 pounds ahead of Huggins.

Davidson's performance, while not indicative of what Chickamauga is capable of producing at its peak, was nevertheless impressive in what turned out to be a challenging autumn tournament. Only three anglers managed a limit on the final day, and several in the top 20 followed up good catches on day one with just a couple of keepers on day two.

Davidson's go-to pattern was typical for fall on most Tennessee River impoundments. He found his best success flipping a YUM Bad Mamma into submerged hydrilla.

"I was fishing stuff I thought the fish would be staging in; coming into the thicker mats," he says. "Day one I got a lot of bites and caught them quick, but that pattern kind of fizzled out."

He responded by moving closer to the bank, where he continued flipping and fishing fast.

"My trolling motor was on high. You flip in there, hop it one time, and if you don't get bit you're on to the next clump. Every fish I caught over 2 1/2 pounds, I basically never got it [the bait] to the bottom," he recalls.

Davidson, from Branchland, W.Va., built up a 4-pound lead going into the third and final day, but felt that the fish he had been catching were thinning out. He decided to take a bit of a gamble in the final round and started slinging a weedless frog over thick mats.



"I went to a new area and caught two solid keepers in the first 30 minutes, and that kind of relaxed me a little bit," he recalls.

Unfortunately, Davidson missed two big fish after that.

"They were both probably 5-pound-class fish, and that got me rattled," he recalls.

Luckily, he'd been saving an area he had found in practice for just such a situation. Not willing to bank on the high-risk frog bite any longer, Davidson ran to that last-ditch area to get back in

his comfort zone and reverted to flipping grass.

"As soon as I pulled up on it I caught three just *bam, bam, bam*," he recalls. "It feels good. I fished clean all week, and that made the difference. In these tough tournaments, when they bite you better put them in the boat."

Putting them in the boat earned Davidson a spot in the 2017 BFL All-American, a check for \$20,200 and a shiny new Ranger Z518C with a 200-hp Mercury motor worth \$45,000. ■

2017 All-American Qualifiers

Boaters:

SCOTT BATEMAN

Jasper, Ind.

DREW BOGGS

Lebanon, Tenn.

RYAN DAVIDSON

Branchland, W.Va.

DUSTIN HUGGINS

Russellville, Ark.

WILLIAM MERRICK

Mount Juliet, Tenn.

MATT STANLEY

Alexandria, Tenn.

Co-anglers:

BRODY CAMPBELL

Oxford, Ohio

JACOB HARRIS

Bonne Terre, Mo.

JEREMY NEW

Yorktown, Ind.

DENNIS TAYLOR

Murray, Ky.

JIMMY TERRY

Mabelvale, Ark.

BILLY WATSON

Murfreesboro, Tenn.

CO-ANGLER CHAMP

Name: Jimmy Terry

Hometown: Mabelvale, Ark.

Total Weight: 20-11 (7 fish)

Winning Program: Terry used a popper and a spinner-bait the first two days to make the top-10 cut, but he earned the win on day three by switching to a Strike King Bitsy Flip Jig with a Zoom Super Chunk trailer. He used a black-and-blue combo around areas with dirty water.



DETAILS

Oct. 6-8, 2016

Presented by Evinrude

Hosted by Vance County Department of Tourism

Divisions: Northeast, Savannah River, Shenandoah, Volunteer



WRIGHT WINS ANOTHER WITH CRANKBAITS

NORTH CAROLINA VETERAN TAKES THE TOP SPOT AT KERR LAKE

By Brian Cope

David Wright of Lexington, N.C., won the 2016 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Regional on Kerr Lake with a three-day total weight of 43 pounds, 9 ounces and pocketed \$20,000 and a new Ranger Z518C with a 200-hp Evinrude outboard. He also gained a berth in the BFL All-American – the fourth in his career.

Based on his past experiences on Kerr Lake, Wright expected to fish shaky heads around grass mats, but at the tournament's outset he was surprised to find much less grass than he had at any other time during the past five years. It necessitated a quick change in his strategy.

"When I fished Kerr Lake 15 years ago, there was very little grass, at least the portion that I fished," says Wright. "Then it became covered up in elodea, and fishing in the fall meant finding the grass. So I expected it to be that way for this tournament."

After seeing the change, Wright reverted to a game plan similar to the one he employed back in the days before the elodea showed up in Kerr.

"At that point, I focused on stumps, brush and rock piles in Nutbush Creek," he says. "I caught most of my fish on rocks."

Wright started with a shaky head, but didn't have much luck. When he spotted fish following the shaky head back to the boat, Wright surmised he might draw strikes on a crankbait. The veteran angler then switched to a crankbait, limited out and culled fish every day of the event.



CO-ANGLER CHAMP



Name: Peter Balishin

Hometown: Sharps Chapel, Tenn.

Total Weight: 24-00 (11 fish)

Winning Program: Balishin won the co-angler division by fishing a shaky head with a Zoom worm in green pumpkin with blue flake. He worked the edges of rocks and grass with a slow presentation. The program worked in the shallows and, on the final day, in deeper water.

Rapala DT10 and DT16 crankbaits in the hot-mustard color handled the bulk of his work early on, with a bluegill-colored DT14 pitching in. On day two, the DT14 was the go-to choice. When that bite slowed, Wright began casting a WEC crankbait (made by Zoom) in bone white with an orange belly. He fished the WEC the rest of the way, cycling back through the Rapalas when the WEC bite cooled off temporarily.

"I think they got tired of seeing those Rapala lures so much over the three-day period, and they were pretty willing to bite the Zoom [WEC]. When the Zoom bite slowed, I would go back through the Rapalas. As long as I threw them near rocks or some type of structure, I knew I would catch fish," Wright says.

On day three, the weather turned nasty as Hurricane Matthew clipped the region. Rain and fog greeted anglers that morning, so at takeoff Wright played it safe, pulling over to let the rest of the field pass him on the way to their preferred fishing holes. Wright then tucked into the first cove out of the wind and began catching fish early on the WEC crankbait. He ended up culling keepers there.

Wright, considered by many to be one of the best crankbait anglers in tournament fishing, says there's more to crankbait fishing than just casting and reeling lures. He relied on his decades of experience with cranking plugs to seal the win.

"Not all crankbaits run true out of the package, but I keep a box of crankbaits that run true, and that I've caught fish on," he says. "That gives me confidence, and that mental part of fishing is what many anglers overlook, especially when weather is a factor." ■

2017
All-American
Qualifiers

Boaters:

CHRIS DAVES, Spring Grove, Va.
BRANDON GRAY, Bullock, N.C.
RICHARD PHILLIPS, Asheville, N.C.
DERRICK SNAVELY, Johnson City, Tenn.
DAVID WRIGHT, Lexington, N.C.
CAVIN YOUNG, Prince George, Va.

Co-Anglers:

PETER BALISHIN, Sharps Chapel, Tenn.
DONNIE DAVIS, Greer, S.C.
DAVID PRIMAVERA, Winder, Ga.
GREG RAVITSKY, Ashburn, Va.
TIMOTHY WACKER, Knoxville, Tenn.
DAVID WINTERS, Rock Hill, S.C.

DETAILS

Oct. 13-15, 2016

Presented by Mercury

Hosted by Kentucky Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau

Divisions: Buckeye, Great Lakes, Illini, Michigan



ASWEGAN WINS TOPWATER DUEL AT KENTUCKY LAKE

SON'S LUCKY ZARA SPOOK KEYED THE VICTORY

By Curtis Niedermier

The mid-October showdown on Kentucky Lake that was the 2016 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Regional presented anglers with a mix of old and new. Old, in the sense that, as usual in fall, weights were lower than what Kentucky Lake is known for in the summer. New, because Kentucky Lake's southern waters were mostly void of the grass that usually attracts about half of the Regional field each year.

With the grass pattern out of play, nearly all of the top 10 finishers relied on the other "usual" fall pattern at Kentucky Lake: fishing topwater on shallow flats in creeks or on shallow bars on or near the main lake. Finding key areas with bait and schools of foraging bass became the winning program, and tournament champ Chris Aswegan uncovered the most productive spot.

Utilizing a "lucky" Heddon Zara Spook that was given to

him by his 5-year-old son, John, for Father's Day, the Tiffin, Iowa, boater tallied 47 pounds, 4 ounces in three days.

"Normally, I always throw a bone-colored Zara Spook," says Aswegan. "He [his son] knows I like to fish a Spook and a frog, but he bought me a shad-colored Zara Spook."

For sentimental reasons, perhaps, Aswegan tied on the Spook, "wrong color" that it was, for some summer derbies on the Mississippi River back home, and then he never cut it off, including at Kentucky Lake. The fish didn't seem to mind.

With a buzzbait mixed in, Aswegan fished a shallow flat all three days. He keyed on a subtle drop-off – from about 8 inches deep down to 18 inches deep – that stretched about 100 yards long where schools of shad were visible along the breakline. Aswegan's only real adjustment was to dial in the sweet spot each day.

CO-ANGLER CHAMP

Name: Jim Budde

Hometown: Waterloo, Ill.

Total Weight: 30-04 (11 fish)

Winning Program: Just like most of the top pros, co-angler champ Jim Budde caught most of his fish on a Zara Spook topwater around shallow bars. Budde also used a spinnerbait and a buzzbait.



"The majority of that 100 yards I didn't catch a fish off of," says Aswegan, who fished about 50 miles south of the Moors Resort takeoff site. "It was a different stretch each day. Most of my bites each day came from a spot about triple the size of a boat."

Aswegan says that fishing the spot reminded him of fishing shallow sandbars on the Mississippi back home. The biggest difference was that there's a lot less current on Kentucky Lake.

In either case, Aswegan suspects that bass don't hang out in deeper water and rush up to ambush bait. Rather, he believes they hang tight along

those shallow depressions and feed when the opportunity presents itself.

"I didn't see them working a lot of bait," Aswegan adds. "Most of the good bites I got were not when they were busting." ■

2017 All-American Qualifiers

Boaters:

CHRIS ASWEGAN

Tiffin, Iowa

MIKE BRUEGGEN

La Crosse, Wis.

BRADLEY LEIFERMANN

Andover, Minn.

RONALD NUTTER

Newark, Ohio

LLOYD PICKETT JR.

Bartlett, Tenn.

CLAYTON REITZ

Morton, Ill.

Co-anglers:

JIM BUDDE

Waterloo, Ill.

TIM GILLILAND

Wellston, Ohio

JIM STONE

Greenwood, Ind.

CARL LINGLE

Dongola, Ill.

MIKE RABER

Wolcottville, Ind.

RANDY WESTERFIELD

Constantine, Mich.



DETAILS

Oct. 13-15, 2016

Presented by Mercury

Hosted by Bainbridge Convention & Visitors Bureau

Divisions: Bulldog, Choo Choo, Gator, South Carolina



DEAKINS CRACKS 50 ON LAKE SEMINOLE

TENNESSEAN WINS REGIONAL IN THE TIMBER

By Dan O'Sullivan



After two days in the runner-up spot, Tennessee angler Marshall Deakins patched together a 17-pound, 13-ounce limit in round three at the Lake Seminole T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Regional to earn the win and his first-ever trip to the BFL All-American.

Deakins concentrated on standing timber in the Spring Creek area of Lake Seminole the first two days of the event when the wind was calm. When the winds picked up on day three, he turned his attention to the more open areas between the trees.

Deakins says that he and his friend and co-angler traveling partner, Lee Graves, uncovered the winning pattern during practice. The key was casting an electric shiner-

colored Zoom Z Craw, which he had Texas-rigged on a 1/8-ounce tungsten bullet sinker with 15- to 17-pound-test fluorocarbon line, and letting it fall vertically alongside the timber. Figuring out the speed at which the Z Craw needed to fall in order to trigger strikes in the standing timber was an important factor.

"In order to get strikes, the lure had to fall very slowly and stay in the strike zone for a long period of time," he says. "If the lure was falling too fast, I wouldn't get strikes from the quality fish."

Deakins reveals that the selection of the Z Craw was also a key because it gave him the profile of a bigger bait with appendages that provided action on the slow

fall. The lure color was also significant. Electric shiner is not a color that is widely distributed, so he believes it gave him an advantage over more standard hues, presumably because the fish have seen all the favorites before.

Deakins pegged the light sinker to keep it and the bait from separating when coming into contact with branches on the way down. Then he made repeated casts to the standing timber and allowed the lure to descend on semi-slack line.

For the first two days, that approach put Deakins in prime position to make the All-American (the top six qualify), but heavy winds on the final day forced a change – a change that allowed him to catch the stringer that closed out the win.

"I had seen those fish [between the stands of dead trees] on my graph while idling through to fish the timber [on days one and two]," Deakins recalls. "I wasn't sure they were bass, but I needed to try something in the wind on day three. I'm really glad I did."

The champ backed off and slowly retrieved an umbrella rig through the gaps in the timber to trigger strikes. He used a three-hook rig with 1/4-ounce jigheads and 4-inch natural light-colored Scottsboro Tackle Company Swimbait to catch the second-largest limit of the day and wound up winning the tournament by a margin of nearly 3 pounds with a 50-pound, 1-ounce combined weight. ■

CO-ANGLER CHAMP

Name: Jessey Rudolph
Hometown: Deltona, Fla.
Total Weight: 36-02 (15 fish)
Winning Program: Rudolph primarily targeted grass. His go-to presentations were to flip mats with a Strike King Rage Twin Tail Menace Grub and work a bullfrog-colored Booyah Poppin Pad Crasher on the surface.



2017 All-American Qualifiers

Boaters:

ROBERT CROSNOW
Inverness, Fla.

MARSHALL DEAKINS
Dunlap, Tenn.

MIKE KEYSO JR.
North Port, Fla.

CHRIS KIRKSEY
Fairmount, Ga.

TYLER MORGAN
Columbus, Ga.

STEVE PHILLIPS
Douglas, Ga.

Co-anglers:

DAVID BOZEMAN
Ocala, Fla.

TONY DIMAURO
Watkinsville, Ga.

RANDY PAQUETTE
Sarasota, Fla.

JESSEY RUDOLPH
Deltona, Fla.

STANLEY (TREY) SHAW
Dunnellon, Fla.

JOHN TRUDEL
Lighthouse Pt., Fla.

DETAILS

Oct. 27-29, 2016

Presented by Ranger Boats

Hosted by Russellville Advertising and Promotions

Divisions: Cowboy, Mississippi, Okie and Ozark



COLLINGS AVOIDS CROWDS, WINS AT DARDANELLE

TAILWATER WING DAMS KEY TO 18-YEAR-OLD'S VICTORY

By Bryan Hendricks



CO-ANGLER CHAMP



Name: Michael Montgomery

Hometown: Cuba, Mo.

Total Weight: 25-00 (14 fish)

Winning Program: The first day, in Piney Creek, Montgomery dragged a green pumpkin Zoom Trick Worm through rocks. He fished the second day far upriver in a section of Spadra Creek using a 1 1/2-ounce white/chartreuse Strike King spinnerbait with a willow-leaf blade and a River2Sea Biggie square-bill crankbait. Montgomery fished with boater champ Sheldon Collings on the third day and caught his fish with a chartreuse/blue River2Sea square-bill.

there before, but I fished down there for one hour in practice and found that one spot, and I went down there every day and just whacked them."

Fortunately for Collings, the tournament coincided with a draining period that flowed a lot of water through the dam. Heavy, continuous current concentrated baitfish and bass around the wing dams, which exist to direct current to the center of the navigation channel.

Collings used a chartreuse/black Strike King KVD 2.5 series square-bill crankbait for most of the tournament. It was a good choice, he says, because it produces an amplified vibration that bass can isolate for reaction strikes in murky water.

"Because of the dirty water, you can't see 2 inches down," Collings says. "When you bring a bait by them, largemouth bass can feel it from 20 feet away."

Collings, 18, lives in Grove, Okla. He says the pattern was similar to certain days on Grand Lake O' the Cherokees, his home lake. And it fit a scenario with which Collings is very familiar. ■

To win the T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Regional Oct. 27-29 at Lake Dardanelle, Sheldon Collings fished where nobody had ever won a major tournament.

Traditionally the best bass fishery in Arkansas, Lake Dardanelle is a vast impoundment and part of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System. It is famous for hot spots such as the Strip Pits, Piney Bay, Illinois Bayou, Delaware Bay and Spadra Creek, just to name a few. These areas are full of bass-rich cover and structure, including grass mats, lily pads, stump fields, ledges, main-lake points and shallow secondary points.

Collings ignored all of those renowned areas. In fact, he forsook Lake Dardanelle altogether and fished water that is universally unloved and disrespected. He went to the Arkansas River tailwater below Dardanelle Lock & Dam.

To the casual observer, there's nothing below the dam but mud, sand and brown water. An astute observer might notice other things however. There are rock wing dams, and there's virtually no fishing pressure. At times, there's also lots of current.

"I wanted to find something out of the way where other people weren't fishing," Collings says. "Everybody was running to clear water in creeks. I didn't want to do that."

Collings combined the three tailwater elements into his first victory. He weighed in a three-day total of 47 pounds, 4 ounces. His reward was a \$20,000 check, a fully rigged Ranger boat and a coveted berth in the BFL All-American.

Collings laid the groundwork for his phenomenal weekend by befriending the lockmaster at Dardanelle Lock & Dam. Collings asked him about the fishing in the tailwater.

"He said that everyone called it a 'dead sea,'" Collings says. "I knew from that point that's what I was going to do. It was more of a go-down-there-and-see kind of thing. I'd never been down

2017 All-American Qualifiers

Boaters:

JUSTIN ATKINS, Florence, Ala.

SHELDON COLLINGS, Grove, Okla.

MELVIN DUNN, Orange, Texas

ROGER FITZPATRICK, Eldon, Mo.

LANE MCGAHA, Dubach, La.

JEFFREY SMITH, Knob Noster, Mo.

Co-anglers:

DAMON DUNCAN, Kansas, Okla.

DAVID LANSFORD, Muskogee, Okla.

DENNIS MEYER, Ballwin, Mo.

MICHAEL MONTGOMERY, Cuba, Mo.

JUSTIN NEWELL, Muskogee, Okla.

RONALD SMITH JR., Kansas City, Kan.

DETAILS

Oct. 27-29, 2016

Presented by GoPro

Hosted by Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau
Divisions: Bama, Music City, North Carolina, Piedmont



NIXON FROGS DOCKS AT HARTWELL

SUMMERTIME PATTERN KEY TO REGIONAL VICTORY

By Brian Cope



CO-ANGLER CHAMP



Name: Alex Hester

Hometown: Crossville, Tenn.

Total Weight: 19-12 (14 fish)

Winning Program: Though it's not Hester's favorite bait to throw, a shaky head is the lure that he used to win the co-angler division at Lake Hartwell and earn a trip to the All-American. Hester caught fish in deep water (as deep as 30 feet), shallow water, stained water and clear water throughout the tournament, all with the finesse rig.

A slow start wasn't enough to derail Jason Nixon's quest for the All-American. Nixon, who won the T-H Marine Bass Fishing League Regional at Lake Hartwell with a total three-day weight of 31 pounds, 2 ounces, opened the tournament in 13th place. On day one he recorded less than half the weight of Clabion Johns of Covington, Georgia, the early leader who shocked the field with a 20-pound, 11-ounce limit.

"I'd never seen a 20-pound bag before. That surprised me, and I figured there was no way for me. I thought he'd do it again the next day, or even if he just did half of that for the next two days he'd surely win," recalls Nixon.

Nixon got a break on day two when Johns weighed in only one keeper and 11 of the top 12 boaters failed to crack the 10-pound mark, allowing Nixon to advance to day three in 10th place with a 17-13 total.

The Wetumpka, Ala., angler landed a limit on all three days, including his best, a 13-pound, 5-ounce bag, on the final day. Day three was a sweltering one that felt more like June than October, but Nixon stuck to his program.

He caught almost all of his fish on a SPRO Bronzeye Pop in the rainforest black color, and he caught all 15 of the

keepers that he brought to the scale, plus a couple of fish he culled, from just two spots on the lake.

"I fished three spots, but the first one I fished didn't produce any fish, so I eliminated it," he says. "I had found three spots with stained water during practice, and the first one cleared up by the time the tournament started. The other two remained stained, and I caught all my fish on those two spots. One was in about the middle of the lake, and the other one was on the lower end."

2017 All-American Qualifiers

Boaters:

JASON NIXON, Wetumpka, Ala.
JASON WILSON, Lincolnton, N.C.
CONRAD BOLT, Seneca, S.C.
BARRY HOOPER, Monticello, Ga.
BRAD FOWLER, Townville, S.C.
TODD HARRIS, Clemmons, N.C.

Co-anglers:

ALEX HESTER, Crossville, Tenn.
CLARENCE RANEY, Murfreesboro, Tenn.
PAT KENDRICK, Bumpass, Va.
RICHARD YOUNG, Ellenboro, N.C.
JEFF SCISM, Shelby, N.C.
MARVIN GODARD, Charlotte, N.C.

The conditions dictated Nixon's approach.

"It was a really warm few days. Hot, actually, so I didn't worry if I was working the frog too fast," Nixon says. "I was pretty steady with it. Jerk, reel, jerk, reel, and I might change up the speed just slightly when I didn't get a bite or at least a swirl for a while."

Nixon says that while most of his fish came on brush near docks in shallow water, he didn't specifically target brush near docks until about halfway through the tournament. That's when the pattern became clear.

"I was just getting as many casts in as I could with the frog around brush that was in shallow water. I really think the key was brush in stained, shallow water, but when you notice another variable like close proximity to docks, it never hurts to focus more on such areas as long as the other ingredients are still there."

Nixon won a \$45,000 Ranger boat and \$20,000 cash. He also qualified for the All-American on Pickwick Lake, which will be held in May.

"It's the first time I've won a boat, and it's the first time I've qualified for the All-American," he says. "I've been trying for this for 16 years, so it feels good to finally get there." ■

DETAILS

Nov. 11-12, 2016

Hosted by Tri-County Lodging Association/Convention & Visitors Bureau

Participation: The Wild Card is open to anglers who pay an entry fee prior to the tournament for all five tournaments in a division, fish at least two tournaments in the same division and do not qualify for Regional competition in any division.

KNIGHT VICTORIOUS AT BFL WILD CARD

DOCK-FISHING PATTERN WINS AGAIN AT LAKE OF THE OZARKS

By Marc Rogers

Jeff Knight of Cleveland, Tenn., capitalized on his opportunity to qualify for the 2017 T-H Marine Bass Fishing League All-American by winning the BFL Wild Card at Lake of the Ozarks Nov. 11-12. The leader after day one with 21 pounds, Knight returned to the scale on day two with another impressive bag weighing 17 pounds, 12 ounces. He won by nearly 2 pounds with a two-day total of 38-12.

Knight's winning pattern was flipping and pitching a jig around boat docks.

"I found this pattern during practice early and could duplicate it in most any cove with boat docks near shallow water," he says. "The jig bite was producing quality keepers for me both days, all day long."

His jig of choice was a 1/2-ounce green pumpkin jig tipped with a Strike King Rage Craw trailer.

"There wasn't anything special about the jig I was using, but the trailer was key in the action needed to produce the fish I caught," Knight says. "The action from the trailer seemed to cause the bass to bite the jig on the fall. I was very confident in the jig pattern. I heard some of the other guys were catching fish on topwater, but I knew I could catch quality bass with a jig, and I never put it down the entire two days."

He concentrated on the inside of the boat dock slips when presenting the jig.

"The bigger bass were holding all the way back inside the boat slips, near the walkways on the docks. I didn't leave my jig in there long," he says. "If they didn't bite quickly, I picked it up and made another flip. The bites were mainly coming on the fall or just after the jig hit the bottom."

Knight set his sights on coves with boat docks in the Shawnee Bend area of the lake, a 12-mile run each day from the takeoff site. He stayed near the 9-mile marker the entire time both days, focusing on boat docks between Galena Point and Lynch Hollow.



The boat dock location within these coves was another key to Knight winning the event.

"I only focused on docks that had 8 to 15 feet of water under them," he says. "If the water under the back of the slips was 10 to 12 feet deep, I was confident the bass would be there on anything less than 10 feet or deeper than 15 feet, I got very few bites."

"Most any dock with the right depth would produce

for me," Knight continues. "But the docks owned by fishermen seemed a little better. I found most of the fishermen's docks had some kind of cover sunk near the docks. Most had brush piles out on the ends of the docks, but the best ones also had brush under the walkways near the back of the slips. I think the bass were holding near the brush, using it to ambush the shad. I think the shade from the docks also helped." ■

2017 All-American Qualifiers

Boaters:

BRENT ANDERSON

Kingston Springs, Tenn.

DYLAN DUNCAN

Kansas, Okla.

JEFF KNIGHT

Cleveland, Tenn.

JEREMY LAWYER

Sarcoxis, Mo.

BENNIE MUTTER

Glasgow, Ky.

ADAM OHMS

Edwardsville, Ill.

Co-anglers:

RICHARD HOOTER

Natchitoches, La.

STEFAN MARGINEAN

Glenview, Ill.

ROB MELENDEZ

Frankfort, Ill.

DALE RENTH

Mascoutah, Ill.

CRAIG ROSE

Olathe, Kan.

MIKE YOUNGBLOOD

St. Louis, Mo.

CO-ANGLER CHAMP



Name: Craig Rose

Hometown: Olathe, Kan.

Total Weight: 22-6 (8 fish)

Winning Program: Co-angler champ Craig Rose kept it simple at the Wild Card. He threw a green pumpkin Zoom Trick Worm on a War Eagle shaky head and "spiked" the worm's tail with chartreuse dye. He caught all of his bass from 1 to 7 feet deep near docks on gravel banks.

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TBF



By Dan Johnson

WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

EVINRUDE G2 FEATURED IN JANUARY REVERSE AUCTION FUNDRAISER

In January 2017, TBF members will have the chance to bid on one of the hottest new outboards in bass fishing – a 150-hp High Output Evinrude E-TEC G2.

TBF members enjoy many benefits, and reverse auctions are among them. The online sales raise funds for TBF youth and conservation programs while offering members one-time incredible deals on great bass fishing gear.

They also add an entertaining twist to the traditional auction format. As the auction progresses, the price falls instead of going up. Each item's starting bid begins at the manufacturer's suggested retail price. For example, if an item lists for \$12,000, that's where the bidding begins. After that, the selling price drops by a set amount at given intervals (which vary from sale to sale), such as \$100 per day, until someone bids on the item and wins that particular sale.

"It's exciting watching the price fall every day, knowing anyone could buy the item at any time," says TBF President Robert Cartlidge. "If you wait too long, you lose your chance at what could be a once-in-a-lifetime discount on great fishing gear."

Cartlidge notes that the process also provides TBF partners' products greater exposure to the masses while helping increase demand.

"It's definitely a win-win process," he says "The auctions are very limited to one item per year on most items, so it drives demand to the retailers for all those who wanted in but waited too long. Plus, everything that has a dealer network still gets run through the dealer network after auction for delivery and installation."

The 150-hp H.O. Evinrude E-TEC G2 is part of Evinrude's revolutionary G2 series, which includes power plants from 150 to 300 hp. The two-stroke outboard is the result of five years of intense research and development, and offers serious bass anglers a number of benefits, including 75 percent fewer emissions, 15 percent better fuel economy and up to 30 percent more torque than leading four-stroke motors. For complete details on the Evinrude G2, visit evinrude.com.

Anyone may browse the TBF auctions at any time. To participate, however, you must set up a bidding account. Registration is a quick-and-easy process, and needs only be done once to participate in as many of the annual auctions as you wish. For details, visit bassfederation.com and click on TBF Online Auctions.



Evinrude's revolutionary 150-hp High Output E-TEC G2 will be on the TBF auction block in January.

TABLE ROCK, KIMBERLING CITY TO HOST 2017 CHAMPIONSHIP

The Bass Federation and FLW announced that the Table Rock Lake Chamber of Commerce and Kimberling City, Mo., will host the 2017 TBF National Championship April 3-8.

The event will be the largest, richest, most exciting championship in Federation history. Because of the recent transition, the championship will include anglers who qualified both under the old state team/divisional format and the new TBF National Semi-Finals Program format.



Table Rock will host the championship event for the second consecutive year.

"We're thrilled The Bass Federation has again chosen Kimberling City on Table Rock Lake to host its national championship," says Sheila Thomas, president of the Table Rock Chamber of Commerce. "Our community is very excited to welcome this great organization and all of its anglers in April."

The championship will be held on Table Rock Lake, launching out of the Port of Kimberling in downtown Kimberling City.

"We're excited to bring TBF anglers what they asked for in the new event format and make a mark in the history books while doing it," adds TBF President Robert Cartlidge. "While we're sad to see the division format go, the excitement, growth and participation nationwide since the transition are proof we're better serving our members."

"We can't wait to get to Kimberling City so the very best grassroots anglers from across North America can test their skills on Table Rock Lake," Cartlidge continues. "The Rock' is a diverse fishery, so everyone can fish his strengths. Plus, the fishing is exceptional, and it's a perfect place for families, with lots to see and do in the area."

The new TBF National Semi-Finals Program that is now feeding this event is mapped out to minimize drive time, cost and time off work, all while helping TBF grassroots anglers fish premier events. The program is comprised of

22 National Semi-Finals competitions that span the traditional seven TBF geographic divisions in North America.

Anglers can qualify for their National Semi-Finals either through a state federation event or directly through their TBF-affiliated local club events. The total number of anglers each state can advance is based on total participation numbers in that state.

At the 2017 TBF National Championship, anglers will compete in a cut format that sees the top boater and co-angler from each state earn a spot in new Evinrude-powered

Ranger Boats for the final three days of competition. Anglers will fight for a share in the record payout and for berths in two of the sport's most coveted events: the Forrest Wood Cup and T-H Marine BFL All-American.

The winning boater advances to the world championship of bass fishing, the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup, for a shot at winning the biggest payday in bass fishing. And 14 finalists – seven boaters and co-anglers – will advance to the 2017 All-American.

The winning boater will also receive the \$100,000 Living the Dream package to include a cash prize, fully paid entry fees in the 2018 FLW Tour as a pro, travel expense stipends for each event and use of a Living the Dream wrapped Ranger boat 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.

TBF is proud "Partners in Fishing" with FLW, which helps support this annual event along with industry-leading TBF sponsors, including Ranger Boats, Evinrude, Cabela's, Humminbird, Minn Kota, Berkley, Lowrance and Power-Pole.

Coverage of the TBF National Championship will be broadcast in high definition on the Pursuit Channel and streamed live daily on bassfederation.com.



PHOTO BY MARC ROGERS

2016 champ
Joseph Webster

THE IDAHO BASS FEDERATION HONORS MILITARY MEMBERS

The Bass Federation clubs have a long history of supporting U.S. armed forces, and The Idaho Bass Federation is no exception.

For five years running, TIBF has held an annual Military Appreciation Tournament. The 2016 event was held July 17 on scenic C.J. Strike Reservoir at Mountain Home, with active personnel from the Mountain Home Air Force Base invited to participate.

A number of service members responded, including several who had fished the TIBF tournament in the past and have come to look forward to it every year.

The event matched up two Air Force personnel with each TIBF volunteer boater, then sent them out onto the 7,500-acre impoundment.

All teams weighed in fish, with the winning weight of 16.53 pounds brought in by service members James

Paulsen and Jose Rivera, who were fishing with TIBF volunteer Jim Brandt.

"This event is extremely rewarding for all boater volunteers as well as the military folks," says TIBF President Tammy Shuyler. "Some of the service members have never fished, and others, who are fishermen, want to enhance their skills with our boaters, all of whom are experienced tournament bass fishermen. It's a win-win for all."

Shuyler commended the TIBF volunteers for their support.

"We had a bit of a challenge recruiting boaters this year due to conflicting schedules," she says. "Many volunteers fished the day prior in other areas of Idaho, then drove several hours to be available for the military tournament."

"We will continue it next year," she reports. "We also plan to include all military branches and grow participation."



NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS PAYOUTS, OPPORTUNITIES GAINING POPULARITY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The Bass Federation's new National Semi-Finals system of qualifying for the TBF National Championship drew impressive turnouts in district competitions coast to coast.

A new benchmark in Semi-Finals payout was set in District 10, when

\$29,320 in cash and prizes – a 114 percent payback – were divvied out when Indiana and Illinois anglers battled on the Ohio River out of Tell City Oct. 22-23.

In the latest event prior to press time, the Virginia Bass Federation hosted the District 12 shootout Nov.

4-6 on the Chickahominy River outside of Williamsburg, Va. The contest handed out a 115 percent payback of \$23,240 in cash and prizes.

At the District 12 event, the top 13 boaters and co-anglers in the 67-boat field shared \$15,075 in total cash payback. Other prizes that were up for grabs included a \$500 Ranger Cup award and the \$1,000 Evinrude E-TEC award for the winning boater if he or she ran a 2012 or newer Evinrude.

Virginia's Dylan Whitmore led the boaters wire to wire and received a \$3,180 paycheck for his efforts, along with a slot in the 2017 TBF National Championship. Fellow Virginian William Hoeffler topped the co-angler division, claiming \$1,590 in cash plus a championship berth.

Plans are already underway for the 2017 TBF National Semi-Finals Program, which pits top grassroots anglers from each state in a "close-to-home" weekend event with neighboring states for significant cash prizes and advancements.

For more information, visit bass-federation.com.



Dylan Whitmore (left) and William Hoeffler claimed top honors in the District 12 boater and co-angler divisions, respectively.

TBF SEMI-FINALS WINNERS OCTOBER THROUGH NOVEMBER

District: 1 – Florida/Georgia
Fishery: Lake Palatka
Date: Oct. 22-23
Winning Boater: John Mobley
Home State: Florida
Winning Weight: 31.73
Winning Co-angler: Dale Rader
Home State: Georgia
Winning Weight: 24.87

District: 8 – North Dakota/Nebraska/
South Dakota
Fishery: Lake Francis Case
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: Terry Laverack
Home State: South Dakota
Winning Weight: 28.14
Winning Co-angler: Brock Belik
Home State: South Dakota
Winning Weight: 23.03

District: 15 – Connecticut/New
Jersey/Rhode Island
Fishery: Connecticut River
Date: Oct. 8-9
Winning Boater: Alex Wetherell
Home State: Connecticut
Winning Weight: 26.43
Winning Co-angler: Joseph Casale
Home State: New Jersey
Winning Weight: 11.52

District: 2 – N. Carolina/S. Carolina
Fishery: Lake Wylie
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: Nelson Walker
Home State: South Carolina
Winning Weight: 20.29
Winning Co-angler: Larry Halsey
Home State: North Carolina
Winning Weight: 10.22

District: 10 – Illinois/Indiana
Fishery: Ohio River
Date: Oct. 22-23
Winning Boater: Allen Boyd
Home State: Indiana
Winning Weight: 9.15
Winning Co-angler: Derick Pendleton
Home State: Indiana
Winning Weight: 7.08

District: 16 – Massachusetts/Vermont
Fishery: Lake Champlain
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: Jim Gildea
Home State: Massachusetts
Winning Weight: 33.94
Winning Co-angler: Colleen McKay
Home State: Massachusetts
Winning Weight: 26.35

District: 3 – Kentucky/Tennessee
Fishery: Ohio River
Date: Oct. 15-16
Winning Boater: David Sullivan
Home State: Kentucky
Winning Weight: 8.06
Winning Co-angler: Brian Bemis
Home State: Kentucky
Winning Weight: 6.15

District: 11 – Michigan/Ohio
Fishery: Sandusky Bay
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: Dave Fogle
Home State: Ohio
Winning Weight: 30.52
Winning Co-angler: Robert Cox Sr.
Home State: Ohio
Winning Weight: 32.16

District: 17 – Maine/New Hampshire
Fishery: Great Pond
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: David Tsao
Home State: New Hampshire
Winning Weight: 29.88
Winning Co-angler: Henry Bobadilla
Home State: New Hampshire
Winning Weight: 27.73

District: 4 – Alabama/Mississippi
Fishery: Lake Neely Henry
Date: Oct. 15-16
Winning Boater: Hunter Hayes
Home State: Alabama
Winning Weight: 25.05
Winning Co-angler: John D. Perez
Home State: Alabama
Winning Weight: 17.13

District: 12 – Virginia/West Virginia
Fishery: Chickahominy River
Date: Nov. 5-6
Winning Boater: Dylan Whitmore
Home State: Virginia
Winning Weight: 28.75
Winning Co-angler: William Hoeffler
Home State: Virginia
Winning Weight: 25.30

District: 18 – Oregon/Washington
Fishery: Banks Lake
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: Matt Krumdiack
Home State: Washington
Winning Weight: 29.73
Winning Co-angler: Kevin Higgins
Home State: Washington
Winning Weight: 18.46

District: 5 – Louisiana/Texas
Fishery: Richland Chambers Reservoir
Date: Oct. 8-9
Winning Boater: James Biggs
Home State: Texas
Winning Weight: 29.41
Winning Co-angler: Jimmy Walls
Home State: Texas
Winning Weight: 14.70

District: 13 – D.C./Delaware/Maryland
Fishery: Naticoke and Wicomico Rivers
Date: Oct. 22-23
Winning Boater: Jeff Mandes
Home State: Delaware
Winning Weight: 22.88
Winning Co-angler: Steve Redden
Home State: Delaware
Winning Weight: 18.66

District: 19 – Idaho/Montana
Fishery: Dworshak Reservoir
Date: Oct. 8-9
Winning Boater: Curtis McCown
Home State: Idaho
Winning Weight: 30.41
Winning Co-angler: Chris Felty
Home State: Idaho
Winning Weight: 22.59

District: 7 – Kansas/Missouri
Fishery: Truman Lake
Date: Oct. 1-2
Winning Boater: Roger Edwards
Home State: Missouri
Winning Weight: 22.21
Winning Co-angler: Ray Cates
Home State: Kansas
Winning Weight: 15.17

District: 14 – New York/Ontario/
Pennsylvania
Fishery: Lake Champlain
Date: Oct. 15-16
Winning Boater: Brad Brodnicki
Home State: New York
Winning Weight: 28.90
Winning Co-angler: Carl Alexander
Home State: New York
Winning Weight: 30.20

District: 22 – Nevada/Utah
Fishery: Lake Mead
Date: Oct. 29-30
Winning Boater: David Hudson
Home State: Nevada
Winning Weight: 10.82
Winning Co-angler: Clif Gallagher
Home State: Utah
Winning Weight: 5.53



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MATT AREY

Shelby, N.C.

By Sean Ostruszka

What's one lake you want to see on the FLW Tour schedule? Beaver Lake doesn't count.

Beaver is not an option? I want to make sure we keep going there. It's paid for the house I'm sitting in right now.

We already go there. Where's somewhere we don't go?

Well, I'd love to see a Forrest Wood Cup in the Charlotte area. There's just such a huge fishing following around here. So a place like Lake Wylie, which is too small for a regular Tour event, would be great to see as a Cup location.

You know where I'd like to go? Logan Martin. I won the Cup as a co-angler there, and we've never been back. But I love it there. It's like Norman where there are so many fish and so many mean spotted bass. I want to go back there.

So is it solely hunting in the offseason for you?

I play indoor volleyball pretty regularly in the offseason. We have a regular league that plays once a week. Some of the guys are pretty good.

Are you and your long arms crushing it at the net?

Man, I like to play, but there are some guys that are good. There's a

retired NBA player who also had a volleyball scholarship – Richard Anderson. He's 6-10. He doesn't play much anymore, but if he wanted to he could break your nose. There's another guy who is 6-7. He's a monster. He doesn't play to his full abilities because it'd be unfair.

What exactly is livermush?

Don't ask. Just eat it. I mean, if the ingredients to hot dogs were on the sides, no one would eat them.

No, I'm asking. What is it?

I honestly couldn't tell you what's in it, but it's just a breakfast meat. Shelby, N.C., is famous for it. It comes in a block, and you can cut some off and fry it, or just eat it raw. I like it on toast with egg and cheese. It's like sausage. It's definitely in its own category for taste. You either love it or hate it. I love it.

Livermush, toast, egg and cheese. Quite the chef, huh?

I'm about as far from a chef as you'll find. I just got myself a Big Green Egg. I'm trying to learn my way around that, but 90 percent of the time my wife would rather me stay out of the kitchen.

You have to have one thing you're decent at making.

I think I make a mean deer chili, but that's about it. One thing I wish I could do more of at tournaments is cook. Some guys get off the water and cook these great meals. Me, I'm too lazy and tired after 12 hours of practice. I just want to grab a sandwich and go to bed.

Do your eating habits improve when your family travels with you?

They only travel with me a few times a year, and really, they know the routine. So I have my downtime, but not much changes. They know I have a job to do.

Still, it has to be great when they are there.

Dude, there is nothing better than having my 4-year-old daughter, Reese, cheering for me at the end of a dock at takeoff.

Is she a pretty good angler?

She's getting pretty good. She has her little *Shimmer and Shine* pole and she can cast a little bit. Mainly she just drops it straight down, but she's caught a carp, one catfish and several bream. I try not to dictate when to go fishing, but when she says she wants to go, by gosh, we take off and go. ■

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