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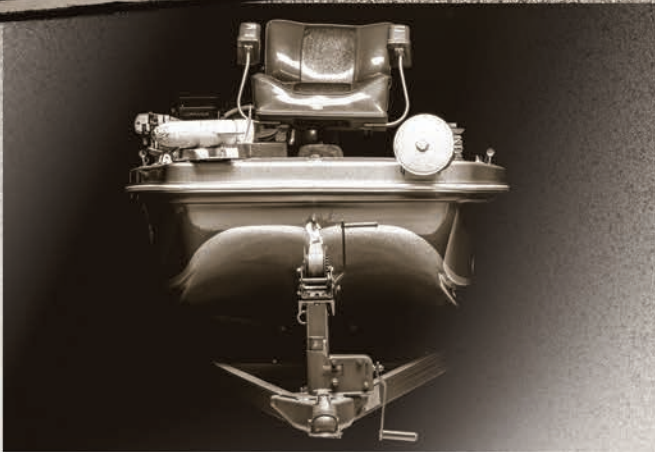
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ELEMENTARY BASS

Ronny McClure had an idea. It wasn't a unique idea, but he was in a unique position to act on it.

McClure wanted to teach kids how to fish.

The difference between Ronny McClure and most other folks who've conjured up the same idea is that he's a trained educator with an actual classroom. McClure teaches physical education to about 300 students at Roundstone Elementary School in rural Mt. Vernon, Ky. Roundstone is the smallest elementary school in Rock Castle County, about 50 miles south of Lexington. McClure describes it as "maybe a poorer school," where some of the students might get to fish, but most rarely have the chance.

That's why his idea sounded so good. After all, most small-town kids, when given the opportunity, take to fishing pretty quickly.

And he figured that if PE classes offered archery and other non-traditional activities, why shouldn't he teach fishing?

"My principal was all for it," McClure says. "I actually approached him with the idea to see what he thought, and he thought it was great. He said that's something he hadn't heard of yet."

The only problem was that McClure didn't have the funds to buy the equipment he needed. So he reached out to Bill Taylor, FLW's senior director of tournament operations and a friend of the McClure family, who gave McClure some important contacts at tackle companies that provide discounts for youth fishing programs. He was able to strike a deal with the folks at Zebco, who were willing to sell McClure a classroom set of rod-and-reel combos at half price. Then he spoke of his idea to local businessman Danny Offutt, owner of Lakeside Electric, who volunteered financial support.

"He likes to fish a lot, too," McClure says. "He also thought it was a good idea. He said, 'I tell you what, you just order what you need, and I'll pay for it.'"

An idea, some enthusiasm and the generous support of a die-hard bass angler is all it took for McClure to add fishing to the PE curriculum at Roundstone Elementary.

He plans to implement a three- to four-week unit of study this spring, focusing on the basics: equipment, casting accuracy and distance, simple knot tying.

I don't know how many other elementary schools, if any, are teaching fishing in the classroom, but I hope McClure's venture is a success. And I think it will be.

Fishing, like archery, is a sport that kids can participate in for their entire lives, whether recreationally or competitively. If they enjoy it, it'll stick with them, unlike many of the traditional ball sports, which most kids stop playing competitively once they finish high school. Fishing also offers an important connection to the natural world. And as long as generous folks like McClure and Offutt, as well as the thousands of FLW and TBF members who participate in youth outreach programs, keep giving generously of their time, energy and enthusiasm, we'll hear more stories like the one from this small country school in the future, and we'll usher another generation of avid anglers into the sport.

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WORLDWIDE BASS

Hussain Mia, a young bass fan from Johannesburg, South Africa, scores an autograph from FLW Tour pro James Watson on the final day of the XIII Black Bass World Championships held on the Vaal River. Team USA earned a silver medal at the event, finishing second behind host country South Africa.

The U.S. team received a warm welcome in South Africa, where tournament fishing remains highly popular and attracts a large fanbase, many of whom passionately follow the U.S. tournament circuits and cheer their favorite pros.

PHOTO BY GEORGE ROBEY



REALTREE FISHING BECOMES OFFICIAL CAMOUFLAGE PATTERN AND BRAND OF FLW

FLW and Realtree recently reached a partnership agreement to make Realtree Fishing the official camouflage pattern and brand of FLW. The partnership will help further both brands' efforts to protect America's outdoor heritage and fishing opportunities for future generations.

As part of the agreement, Realtree Fishing will receive exclusive exposure across all of FLW's media platforms and at FLW's tournaments and expos, including prominent display at YETI FLW College Fishing and Bass Pro Shops FLW High School Fishing events.

"I grew up not only in the woods but on the water," says Realtree President and CEO Bill Jordan. "My family lived an outdoor lifestyle. It was core to everything we did. In fact, my father owned two boat businesses for many years, so that really put me in touch with fishing's impact on not only the economy, but also its positive effect on people of all ages. With all of this in mind, it is a great pleasure for me to offer our new Realtree Fishing pattern and brand to fishing enthusiasts everywhere, and to work with FLW to ensure that people are free and able to fish for many years to come."

"We are proud to announce our partnership with Realtree, an industry leader that shares the same enthusiastic outdoors audience as FLW," says Trish Blake, FLW president of marketing. "Their camouflage has been a favorite among hunters and outdoorsmen for many years, and we are excited to showcase the high-quality Realtree Fishing gear and apparel. This partnership is truly a win-win for our anglers, fans and the sport of professional bass fishing." ■



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Photo courtesy of TakeMeFishing.org

U.S. ANGLERS WIN SILVER AT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP



PHOTO BY GEORGE ROBEBY

U.S. team members David Dudley and Mark Rose helped score a second-place finish at the XIII Black Bass World Championships.

The United States bass fishing team won the silver medal at the XIII Black Bass World Championships on the Vaal River in Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, in October. Resident favorite South Africa earned the gold.

U.S. team members included Scott Martin (team captain), Lionel Botha (team manager), David Dudley, Mark Rose, James Watson, Fred Roumbanis, Scott Canterbury and David Fritts. They competed against 12 other nations from Africa, North America and Europe.

"It was really a great experience. It was pretty humbling to be over there and have as many fans as we had," says Canterbury. "We had, like, the whole South African nation pulling for the United States. They keep up with fishing over there, and they watch every video they can. They would get pretty loud and crazy when we were around. I fished with Scott [Martin] every day. We had guys follow us around and cheer for us. We had people hold up Scott's picture."

October is a spring month in the Southern Hemisphere, and anglers encountered everything from late prespawn activity to the early waves of the bedding season during the tournament. According to Canterbury, the spawn was really starting to turn on during practice, but a cold front knocked things back in the three-day tournament's opening round.

After beginning the event in sixth place, the U.S. anglers caught day two's second-biggest stringer to move to

fourth and then put together the top performance on day three to jump into second place.

"It took us a little while to figure it out," Canterbury adds. "The fish didn't relate to cover like they do normally over here, even though they were trying to spawn. You catch fish off docks when they spawn over here, but you couldn't get bit on docks over there. Anywhere there was shade or overhanging trees, there were so many carp that we figured they had run the bass out. Once we got away from trying to fish cover, we figured out that we could catch them pretty good."

Teamwork was a big part of the Americans' success. Working together in practice, the U.S. anglers dialed in on flat "nothing" banks with no cover other than some seawalls.

"We shared all information," adds Dudley. "Everybody contributed, whether it was knowledge about a jerkbait, or about whatever. It was a team effort. We really clicked as a team. It was really cool."

Next year's Black Bass World Championships will be held in Mexico before returning to South Africa in 2019. Lake Murray in Columbia, S.C., will host the event in 2020. ■

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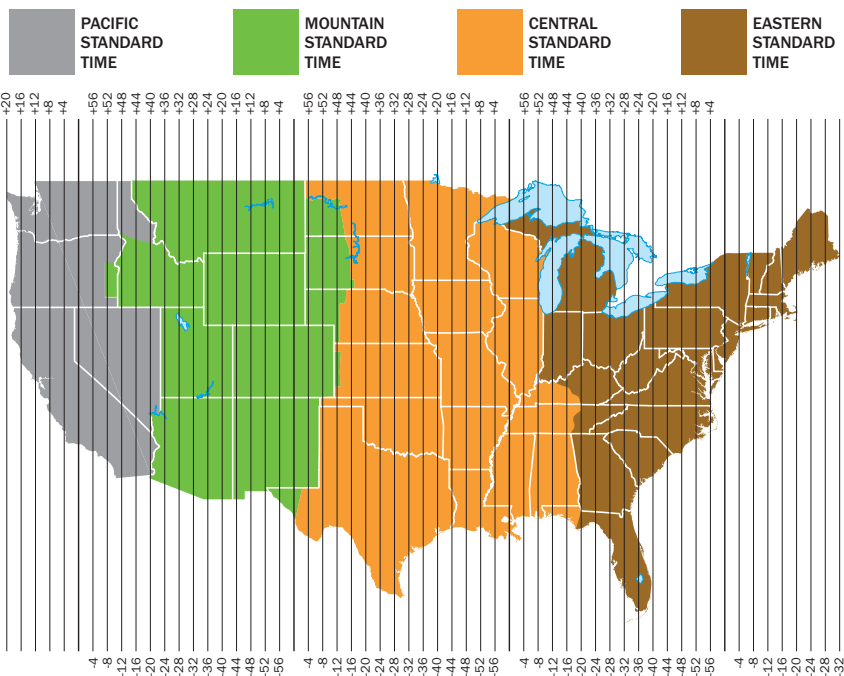
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		Minor	Major	Minor	Major				Minor	Major	Minor	Major	
1	Wed	2:05	8:10	2:20	8:35		1	Fri	2:20	8:25	2:35	8:55	
2	Thu	2:50	8:55	3:05	9:20		2	Sat	3:05	9:15	3:25	9:45	
3	Fri	3:35	9:45	3:55	10:10		3	Sun	4:00	10:15	4:25	10:40	☉
4	Sat	4:25	10:35	4:45	11:05	☉	4	Mon	4:55	11:20	5:30	11:55	
5	Sun	5:20	11:35	5:40	--:--		5	Tue	6:05	--:--	6:40	12:25	
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10	Fri	10:45	4:30	11:15	5:00	☾	10	Sun	11:10	5:00	11:40	5:25	☾
11	Sat	11:30	5:20	--:--	5:45		11	Mon	--:--	5:45	12:00	6:10	
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26	Sun	10:55	4:45	11:20	5:05	☾	26	Tue	11:10	5:00	11:35	5:20	☾
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30	Thu	1:30	7:35	1:45	8:05		30	Sat	1:55	8:05	2:15	8:35	
							31	Sun	2:55	9:00	3:10	9:30	

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

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ROB NEWELL

Tackle Time



I enjoy nearly everything about the sport of fishing with one major exception: tackle

Quite honestly, I hate “doing tackle.” From buying it to organizing it to maintaining it to tying it on; it makes me crazy.

Back when I fished tournaments a lot, I loathed the idea of packing and rigging endless amounts of tackle. I’d spend hours respooling reels, changing out hooks, making jig skirts, and sorting through hundreds of lures and thousands of hooks and weights. All of it was pure misery to me. Meanwhile, so many of my competitors seemed to love rigging tackle, which made me crazier.

Apparently, though, I’m not alone in my aversion to doing tackle. For this column, I talked to several top pros on opposite sides of the tackle aisle: those who detest tinkering with tackle and those who have a love affair with lures. It turns out there’s a wide range of opinions, and enjoying doing tackle or avoiding it actually factors into some pros’ fishing styles.

First, there’s two-time FLW Tour AOY Bryan Thrift, a true tackle tycoon.

“I love fiddling with tackle,” says Thrift, who spends three to four hours a day in his tackle room during the offseason, prepping and organizing. “If I can’t be on the water, working on tackle is the next best thing. It’s not a chore to me; I really enjoy it.

“Getting everything exactly how and where I want it makes for better efficiency,” he adds. “Whether I’m organizing boxes, changing out hooks, spooling up reels or tying up different jig skirt colors, it’s all part of the process. I really don’t know why anybody who fishes professionally wouldn’t love that part of it.”

Bryan, meet Andy Morgan.

“I don’t like doing tackle at all,” says Morgan, a three-time AOY. “I know it’s a downfall of mine, but I don’t keep up with the latest tackle trends or sit in the shop all winter loading up boxes for the next season.

“After the Cup this year, I put all my tackle in a corner, and that’s where it’ll stay until it’s time to go to the first event next year,” he adds. “I’m just not a tackle freak. I bought my first Whopper Ploppers this summer. That’s how far behind I am on tackle trends and prep.”

In all fairness, Morgan did pay more attention to tackle early in his career when he fished all year. Since then, he has cut most of the late summer, fall and winter fishing out of his tournament schedule, eliminating the need for a year-round supply of tackle.

Morgan’s minimalist prep procedure is based on time management.

“I do very little tackle at home,” he says. “I don’t even mess with tackle until I see the long-range forecast for the tournament

we're going to next. Once I see if it's going to be warm, cold, rainy, muddy, hot, clear or whatever, that's when I'll start pulling some stuff off the shelves and putting it in the truck.

"I used to spend a bunch of time messing with tackle, building boxes of particular lures and stuff like that. Then I carried all those boxes around all year and they did nothing but get in my way because I hardly used them."

Clark Wendlandt, another three-time FLW Tour AOY, shares Morgan's disposition on tackle.

"It's a burdensome chore, mainly because it's so tedious to keep up with," Wendlandt says of tackle duties. "I'd rather fish than work on tackle. If you told me I could only have a 1/2-ounce spinnerbait and go fishing right now or spend half the day organizing several boxes of tackle so I could have more options on the water, I'd take my chances with the spinnerbait and fish with it all day."

These stories are not the ones FLW pro Zack Birge wants to hear. Birge falls much more on the tackle-obsessed side of the aisle.

"I can't stand having any disorganization in my boat or tackle storage," Birge says. "I'm pretty obsessive about it. My boat is my office, and I want a clean and organized office at all times."

With Birge and Thrift in one camp and Morgan and Wendlandt squarely in the other, I thought perhaps it was a generational thing. The young guns seem far more into the tedium of tackle than the old guard. However, the views of veteran pro Larry Nixon and young gun John Cox throw a bit of a wrench into that theory.

"Oh, I love it," Nixon says of tackle time. "I'll guarantee you I'm every bit as much of a tackle freak as Bryan. From Jan. 15 until my last tournament of the season, tackle prep, organization and equipment maintenance are all I do when I'm at home. It's what I do to stay focused on the next event. It's a constant job to stay organized when fishing professionally, and I spend hours and hours doing it."

"Having to do tackle reminds me of having to do homework as a kid," Cox says. "I'll put it off and put it off until the last minute. I dread it. That's why I own very few hard baits other than Rat-L-Traps. I'm way more of a soft plastic, ChatterBait and swim jig kind of guy. Those kinds of lures are far easier for me to manage."

Interestingly, Cox says what he neglects in lure upkeep and organization he makes up for in other aspects of equipment.

"The biggest thing I'm a freak about is rod actions," he says. "I think rod action, line size and reel ratios have far more of an effect on lure actions and getting bites than polishing spinnerbait blades and stocking boxes with hundreds of lures in dozens of colors. That's why I build my own rods. I spend a lot of time dialing in rod action, line size and reel ratio combinations that will make a bait reach its maximum potential and load up a rod correctly when I get a bite."

If you enjoy doing tackle, you're lucky. Consider it a real asset to your game. But if you avoid doing tackle at all costs, just know you're not alone. Some of the best sticks in the game are not necessarily tackle freaks, either. ■

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



Messing with tackle is far from enjoyable to some pros such as Clark Wendlandt, but it's still an important part of tournament preparation.



**COLIN
MOORE**

Down, But Not Out

.....

Regardless of whether you consider him a hero or a heel, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer came up with a gem when he noted that "it's not how many times you get knocked down that count; it's how many times you get back up."

Of course, there was that one time along the Little Bighorn River when Custer couldn't get back up, but that's another story. His timeless maxim is applicable to anyone with a hard row to hoe, including pro fishermen, who have to learn to take a licking and keep on ticking if they plan to stick around for very long.

At the Forrest Wood Cup in August, a couple of prime examples stood out: Clark Reehm and Mark Rose. On the tournament's first day, Rose had 1-8, which put him dead last in the field of 53 anglers. Reehm was in 44th place, with a pair of bass that weighed 4-14. When you're that far down, it's tempting to give up and go home – mentally, if

not physically – as the confetti flutters down on somebody else.

That's not how the big boys operate, however. On the second day, Rose returned with 14-3 to finish 36th. Reehm ended his tournament with a limit that weighed 15-11 and bumped

him up to 23rd. It didn't make any difference in the money they got, but it made a big difference in their self-respect.

FLW history is replete with such comebacks – some of them much more dramatic. There was Brandon McMillan at the Potomac River this year, going from an opening-round 126th to sixth in the final standings; Clark Wendlandt at Beaver Lake in 2009, starting in 100th place and winding up in third. Remember the 2013 Forrest Wood Cup, when Jacob Wheeler went from 40th place on day one to runner-up on day four and bumped his guaranteed earnings from \$10,000 to a cool \$75,000 in the process? Or how about the Costa FLW Series Central Division tournament on Kentucky Lake in May 1999 that Bill McDonald of Greenwood, Ind., won? He went from 115th place on the first day with a single bass that weighed 2 1/2 pounds to first in the fourth and final round. It still ranks as the greatest rally for a Costa angler in the series' history.

Rose and Reehm provided a couple of other examples at the Cup. Put them in separate rooms and ask them how they rebounded there, and it's as if they were both reading from the same script.

"Herring fisheries are my weakest. After 18 years of doing this, I still think bluebacks are just crazy," opines Rose. "So instead of chasing them around I chose to go upriver and spend most of my practice up there. I found a really good cranking hole upriver where I thought I could do well – maybe 12 to 13 pounds a day. It was the best thing I had going. The first day I returned to that hole, and I never caught a fish. I still don't understand what happened to them.



Clark Reehm

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

"Going into day two, I said to myself, 'This tournament is pretty much shot, so I'm fixin' to learn how to be a better herring fisherman,'" Rose adds. "'I'm just going to stay out of the way of the leaders, learn to read the water and do my own thing.' That's what I did, and I caught over 14 pounds. I could walk away from there saying to myself, 'Well, it didn't get the best of me.' I left on a positive note. And I'm better prepared for a herring fishery the next time we fish one."

For his part, Reehm is used to making comebacks. Earlier this year, at the FLW Tour stop at Lake Travis, he was in 108th place after the first day, but by tournament's end he was in fourth. At the Cup, Reehm staked his strategy on a pattern that didn't pan out any better than Rose's.

"On the morning of the second day, I'm analyzing what to do. Realistically, I'm out of it. So if I'm not in it to win it after day one, I'm in it for a check," says the Texan, who recently moved to Louisiana. "Now my goal is to make the top 20 – that's the next check level. I said to myself, 'OK, I need to go back and learn how to fish blueback herring.' I went back to points and places where I knew there should be herring. I had an ima Skimmer Grande and a Zoom Super Fluke. I started running a one-two punch. I lost several fish doing that, but ended up grinding out about 16 pounds. I had the bites to have a 20-pound-plus bag, but I lost fish. So it cost me \$5,000, but at least I put myself in a position to do some good. When I decide I don't have a chance to win, I establish mini goals to salvage what I can, even if there's no check involved."

Which brings us to the point of even trying to scramble out of a deep hole: Win or lose, good or bad, every tournament is the building block in a career – or should be. The best don't spend a lot of time wondering what it would be like to win a championship or what it would mean to their personal circumstances. They don't stake everything on winning and then fall apart when things don't go their way.

The best spend most of their time figuring out how to catch fish when the odds seem against it. The best are consummate problem solvers, and their determination to go around seemingly impassable obstacles ultimately converts them into champions. ■



Mark Rose

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF



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TAKEOFF

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Two tactics for cold-weather success

Greg Gutierrez spills on his favorite finesse technique

How bass gills work

Catching Lake Michigan's giant smallies in the late season

A look at how *FLW Live* is put together

CASEY SCANLON BEGAN HIS CLIMB TO THE TOUR RANKS FROM AN UNEXPECTED REGION OF THE COUNTRY

Joe Balog's tips for selling your bass boat

TAKEOFF
IN SEASON

Seasonal tips and tricks + other odds and ends

By Paul Strege



WINTER SWIMBAITING

By the time early winter arrives, bass have completed their seasonal migrations, often settling into deep-water schools. One of the most popular methods anglers use to catch them is vertical jigging. When schools move, however, they can be difficult to relocate with a vertical presentation. Paducah, Ky., pro Terry Bolton tracks them down with a 4-inch Zoom Swimmer rigged on a 1/2-ounce VMC SBJ Swimbait Jig.

"When the school moves or stops biting, I'll back off of the area and slowly run the swimbait through it," he says. "It is more effective and easier to control horizontally than jigging spoons or Rapala Jigging Raps. The big key is to fish the Swimmer very, very slowly."

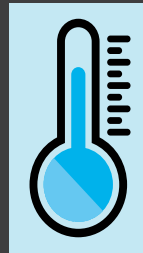
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WARMING TRENDS

Deep isn't the only winter approach.

"On New Year's Day a few years ago, I went out on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway and found a bunch of big fish up shallow and ready to bite," recalls Forrest Wood Cup champ Justin Atkins. "It had been very cold, but a three-day stretch of decent weather had warmed up the water and really turned on the fish. It was an awesome bite."

Since then, Atkins has tested the shallow bite on other waters and found that success depends primarily upon temperature trends – warming trends being ideal – and identifying those locations that warm fastest.

"On Tennessee River system lakes, the best areas are shallow pea gravel banks. On other river systems like the Tombigbee, they'll get up on spawning flats with lily pad roots or any type of little grass."



SET AN ICE BASS RECORD

Located in Hayward, Wis., the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame (freshwater-fishing.org) maintains many sets of angling records, including for ice fishing. For those looking to establish a new national mark through the ice this winter, here are the bass records to beat:

LARGEMOUTH



ICE FISHING, ROD AND REEL, KEPT DIVISION

9 pounds, 2 ounces
Jan. 16, 1996
Farm pond, Illinois

ICE FISHING, ROD AND REEL, RELEASED DIVISION

22 inches
Jan. 30, 2000
Erickson Lake, Wisconsin

SMALLMOUTH



5 pounds, 11 ounces
Jan. 8, 1989
Nokomis Pond, Maine

19 inches
Feb. 12, 1998
Lake Superior, Wisconsin

PRO CHOICE: FAVORITE WINTER FISHERIES



1. Bryan Thrift Lake Norman, N.C.

"The lake has a ton of fish in it, and there are two power plants on opposite ends of the lake that warm the water with their discharges and provide good winter opportunities."



2. Scott Suggs Lake Hamilton, Ark.

"By winter, the boat traffic has dropped way off, and the fish aren't nearly as pressured as they are at other times of the year."



3. Jason Reyes Smith Lake, Ala.

"I've always liked it for the big spotted bass, and when you find schools in early winter, you can count on them to be there the entire season." ■



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THE GREG SHAKE

GREG GUTIERREZ'S TAKE ON THE NATE SHAKE FINESSE TECHNIQUE

By Curtis Niedermier



PHOTO BY JESSE SCHULTZ

California pro Greg Gutierrez didn't create the Nate Shake technique. That distinction goes to Western pro Nate Lemons, who devised the tactic of snapping a finesse worm through the middle of the water column to target suspended bass.

Once he saw the technique in play and how effective it was, however, Gutierrez put his own twist on it, designed his own tackle for it and learned how to apply it to suspended bass as well as those lurking closer to bottom. We're calling his variation the Greg Shake. In his eyes, it's one of the most effective ways of targeting inactive fish.

Targeting a Plane

The Greg Shake can be fished two ways: targeting a "plane" or horizontal band of water, or following a contour. The former is Gutierrez's way of targeting suspended bass that often feed above standing timber in the deep, clear reservoirs near his Red Bluff, Calif., home. The latter gets the call for idle fish situated along points, steep banks and breaklines.

Instead of a straight retrieve, Gutierrez twitches or shakes a carefully matched worm or swimbait and jighead horizontally on a slow retrieve.

How to Shake

The technique is all about depth control, which requires a balance of the right fishing line, bait size and shape (which dictates water resistance), head size, and retrieve speed. Gutierrez uses 6-pound-test Gamma fluorocarbon to get his baits deeper, and 8-pound-test copolymer or monofilament if he wants to stay a little shallower. Exactly how deep each setup will get depends on the other factors mentioned.

Once rigged, he fires out and counts the bait down. Then the key is working the bait so it stays within that zone using a consistent rod shake and slow retrieve.

"Nate would whip the rod – literally rip it – and move it anywhere from 12 to 24 inches in a whip," Gutierrez says. "I started keeping my movement tighter, so it added a continuous pulse to the worm versus a long pause and 'float.' I'm moving the rod tip maybe 2 or 3 inches.

"I figured out that if the fish were negative and had a chance to bite it, feel it and spit it, with that continual pulse they would feel it, and it would be like a live bait trying to escape. Then they would bite it again and turn with it. I took his long pause and hard whip and changed it to a shorter pulse and had a lot better hookup ratio."

The Components

For Suspended Fish and Shallower than 20 Feet

- 1/16- to 3/16-ounce darter head with No. 1 hook



Top plastic colors: green pumpkin, green pumpkin watermelon, sprayed grass

Gutierrez says not to shy away from big finesse worms. Even though the fish are neutral, if they do eat, they'll often take a bigger forage imitator first. He helped design the Reaction Innovations The Flirt with a flat "planing" bottom and twitching tail bulb specifically for this type of finesse application. The bigger Flirt 6.95 has more drag, and thus can be fished slower.

The pro uses a custom darter head that he designed and unfortunately is not willing to show, but other darter heads will work if you balance head size with speed and depth. For instance, a heavier 3/16-ounce head can be fished 10 to 15 feet deep at a higher speed for covering water, while a 1/16-ounce head can be fished deeper and ultra-slow for truly negative fish. Rig the hook exposed.

For Bottom Fish, Cover or Deeper than 20 Feet

- 3/16-ounce Frenzy Baits NAIL



Top plastic colors: male perch, crystal shad, smallmouth magic

The flat face of the NAIL, which Gutierrez designed and sells, helps this rig "plane out," or increase its water resistance, which allows it to be fished slowly just like the standard darter head version. Yet, by rigging it Tex-posed, the combo will sneak through woody snags. Gutierrez says it also crawls over rocks well without rolling and potentially hanging up.

In situations where Gutierrez wants to scrub bottom or follow a contour, he works it with the same basic retrieve. On steep-falling banks, where it's tougher to maintain bottom contact, he'll let it touch down once in a while to ensure he's staying in the strike zone and might alter the retrieve to a lift-and-fall technique, shaking the bait as it falls back down.

"You've gotta have a little belly in the line, or it won't touch the bottom," Gutierrez adds. "It'll stay on contour if it's tight."

Feeling bites: With any deep-water, light-line technique, bites can be subtle. Gutierrez says to focus on the drag and tension in the line. If 8-pound-test line suddenly feels like 6-pound test (less drag) or 10-pound test (more drag), that subtle difference might have been caused by a fish sucking in the worm.

"It's a very subtle bite because you're fishing for very negative fish," Gutierrez says. "You're not getting that really hard *tonk* when a fish hits." ■

Keys to Success

Rod: Gutierrez uses a 7-foot, fast-action, medium-power spinning rod with a "really light tip." To him it's perfect for making long casts and setting the hook in deep water.

Big worms: To fish accurately, it's important to experiment with sink rates and countdowns to make sure you know where your bait is in the water column. Retrieve speed is also important, with slower usually being better, but the plastic plays an important role, too.

"I prefer a bigger piece of plastic that has a slower fall when you're moving it horizontally through the water column," he says. "It has more water resistance. The way the Flirt worm is designed with the ribbing, it 'tightens up' my line a little more, so I can feel a little better. I can feel a little bit more tension on the line."

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f t p i

ALL ABOUT GILLS

HOW THEY WORK AND HOW TO PROTECT THEM

By TJ Maglio

Everyone knows that virtually all fish, bass included, “breathe” with the aid of gills rather than lungs. In addition to fish, many amphibians, mollusks and crustaceans also use gills to get the oxygen they need to survive.

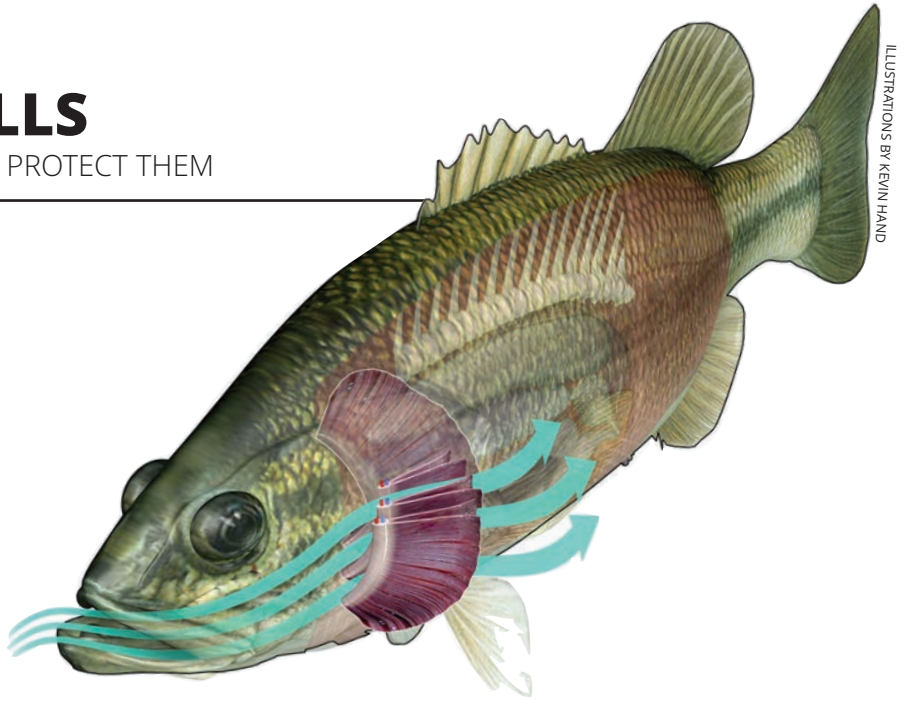
Although most anglers certainly know bass have gills, it’s a good bet far fewer know anything about how they work. Here’s a look at the form and function of gills and how to protect them so fish can be released unharmed.

Why Gills?

Human lungs draw oxygen out of the air and remove carbon dioxide through gas exchange across a matrix of microscopic air sacs called alveoli. The diaphragm inflates and deflates the lungs as we breathe.

Water is approximately 777 times denser than air and contains only a fraction of the oxygen. If your lungs had to “breathe” water, your diaphragm wouldn’t be nearly strong enough to inflate or deflate, and your alveoli couldn’t produce nearly enough oxygen to sustain life.

Given the difficulty of breathing in water, fish evolved gills, which contain thousands of filaments connected to a vast network of blood-rich capillaries.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN HANDB

This provides a large surface area for extracting oxygen from the water and secreting carbon dioxide.

How They Work

Most freshwater fish have three pairs of gills aligned on each side of their throat. The gill filaments are attached to the bony gill arches and covered by the operculum, which is the plate-like structure along the side of a fish’s head.

Bass “inhale” by contracting their throats to draw water in through their mouths, and then “exhale” by opening the operculum to allow the water to escape out the gill slits.

Protecting Gills

In addition to carefully handling bass to avoid physical trauma to the gills and other organs, there are several ways to ensure you’re protecting bass gills when fishing.

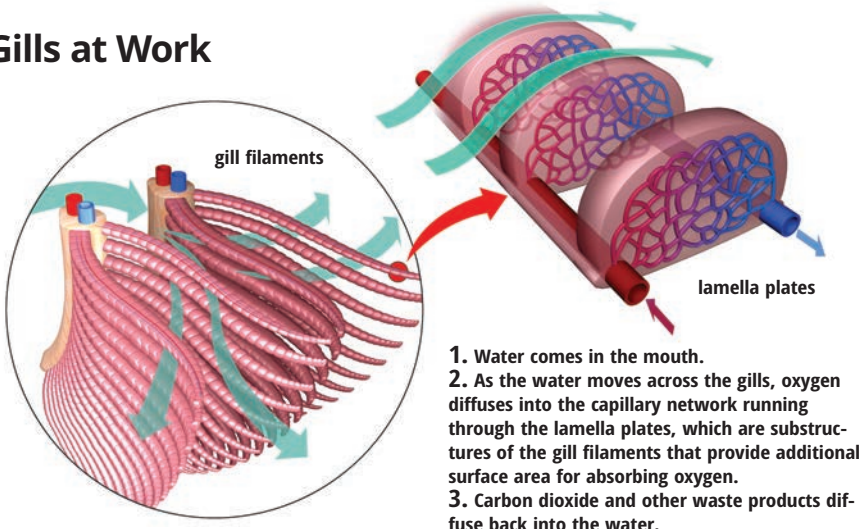
Keep them in the water – Gill tissues will be damaged by prolonged exposure to air. Release fish quickly, and try to minimize their exposure to air when culling or while at the weigh-in stand.

Don’t touch them – Try to avoid “gilling,” or lifting bass by the gill plates. This can seriously damage the gill tissue.

Don’t use peroxide – Some anglers still believe that adding hydrogen peroxide to livewell water can increase dissolved oxygen. It can’t, and it actually causes damage to sensitive gill tissue. Stick with cool water and approved livewell treatments.

Unhook fish quickly and carefully – This goes without saying, but ripping a hook through gills can severely damage them, so make every effort to unhook deeply hooked fish quickly and cleanly. Keep a quality needle-nose plier handy, and if possible unhook bass in a landing net that’s submerged. When a bass is hooked in its gills, consider working the hook loose from behind the gill plate, rather than through the mouth. This is often the best way to remove it without causing excess damage. ■

Gills at Work





fish are chasing shad in the fall

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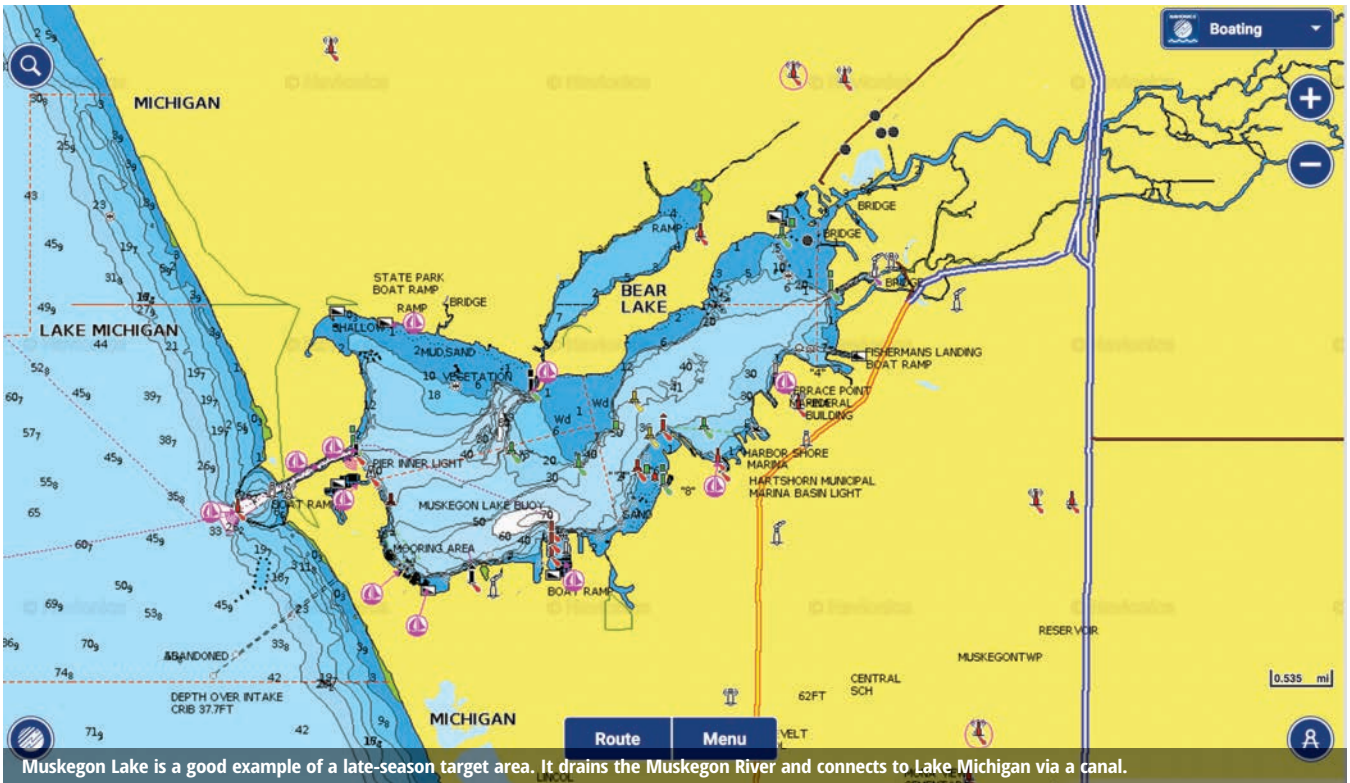
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KEYING IN ON DROWNED RIVER MOUTHS

HOW RON NELSON TARGETS LATE FALL SMALLMOUTHS IN THESE UNIQUE GREAT LAKES AREAS



Muskegon Lake is a good example of a late-season target area. It drains the Muskegon River and connects to Lake Michigan via a canal.

By Chad Love

When fall weather finally turns cold in southern Michigan and sends most anglers into the deer woods or the recliner, you're likely to find Costa FLW Series pro Ron Nelson bundled up on Lake Michigan, enjoying his favorite late-fall fishing approach: targeting big smallmouths in Lake Michigan's drowned river mouths.

What are They?

These coastal estuaries along the shore of Lake Michigan are basically permanently flooded areas and coastal lakes located near the mouths of rivers draining into the big lake. Some are man-made, while others were formed thousands of years ago as water levels rose and river deltas were submerged and flooded by the lake's waters.

Nelson says these isolated backwater areas, usually connected to the main lake by a canal or channel, attract

both baitfish and bass as winter approaches.

"In Michigan in the fall, it's all about change," says Nelson, who won the 2017 Costa FLW Series tournament on Lake Champlain, "and it's the ideal time to fish river mouths, as the water temperature is falling, the days are getting shorter and baitfish in lake Michigan are moving shallow, migrating into those river mouths. The big fish are following them."

Consequently, smallmouths that have been scattered across the lake all summer gang up in smaller, shallower areas that can be fished from first frost until he has to break ice to reach them.

Choosing a River Mouth

Nelson says there's no hard-and-fast rule in choosing which river mouths to fish, but typically he'll start

looking for potential areas in late August as air temperatures start to dip and the prevailing lake winds switch around to the east and cause the water temperature to start dropping.

He tends to key in on the ends of piers located at the inlets to coastal lakes and estuaries. Nelson says the pier heads attract bass that use them as early staging areas prior to moving into the river mouths.

"The pier heads are a great pattern in late August and September as they draw those fish in," he says. "It's an ideal early season pattern. Then, as you transition into late fall, you know those fish are moving into the river mouth lakes themselves, looking for winter spots."

Nasty Weather, Hot Bite

Nelson's drowned river mouth pattern is based on the old adage of following the food. It's all about finding the

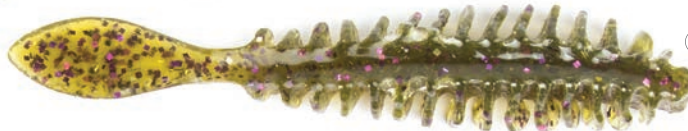


● Reaction Innovations Big Dipper

● Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver



● Poor Boy's Erie Darter



right size and numbers of baitfish coming into the river mouth and, of course, that means weather plays a big role in whether the bite comes off hot or slow.

"It all depends on how fast the season changes," says Nelson. "Some years we'll have a long, drawn-out, gradual transition, and other years winter moves in quickly."

Generally, the worse the weather, the better the bite, as bad weather causes baitfish to pour into the sheltered water from Lake Michigan, with big bass right behind them.

"If you get a lot of rough, cold north wind it provides an unstable environment in the lake," he adds. "That's when you get a big push of both bait and bass coming in. On the other hand, if the weather turns mild, that bait starts filtering back out of the river mouths. You can pretty much predict when the bite's going to be on just by the weather."

Nelson says in years when bait migrates en masse into the river mouths the smallmouths can be found pretty much anywhere, from shallow sandbars in just a few feet of water, to ledges in 12 to 20 feet of water.

"When there's a lot of bait those bass will 'wolf pack,' and you can see them chasing bait on the sandbars. When it's like that it can be some of the best fishing of the year. It'll definitely make you get out of your tree stand."

Pattern and Baits

To find fish, Nelson first finds the bait, utilizing his Lowrance electronics to mark baitfish schools on the ledges, bars and shoals that are the predominate features in river mouths. Once he finds them he uses a number of baits, including silver-colored blade baits, umbrella rigs, swimbaits and what he calls "glide baits" – in this instance soft

plastics with a planing surface that causes them to glide through the water as they sink.

"I love starting the fall off by throwing a Reaction Innovations Skinny Dipper on a straight ball-head jig," says Nelson. "The weight of the ball-head depends on the conditions. In the fall, when we have the weather-induced mass migrations, the fish come in and they'll hit the first sandbar they can find, and it could be in 2 or 3 feet of water. In that case, I'll use a 1/8-ounce jighead or something light. When baitfish movement is light and they're scattered out I tend to use heavier ball-heads on the deeper ledges."

Later in the season, once water temperatures start getting into the 48- to 47-degree range, Nelson starts throwing a mix of umbrella rigs and glide baits.

"The A-rig is one of those magic baits that you just can't beat for schooling

fish in the fall. I use a 6-inch Reaction Innovations Big Dipper in bad shad green as the middle attractor, with 5-inch Skinny Dippers as outer baits."

He fishes the soft-plastic glide baits on light ball-head jigs of 1/16 or 1/8 ounce.

"I use pretty much anything, whether it's a Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver or a Poor Boy's Erie Darter, that I can fish on a light ball-head weight that lets me glide it through the water column," Nelson says.

To accomplish that, Nelson sets up on a ledge, casts toward the fish and lets the bait glide to the bottom.

"No shaking or hopping it; just sweeping the rod and letting the bait pendulum back to you is how I fish it. That is an ideal cold-water presentation, and the fish will just jump on it," he says. "It's very similar to a Ned rig in that it's a bait that's designed to wobble in the water column and just glide its way forward." ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF RON NELSON



Ron Nelson tracks fish up into river mouths off Lake Michigan from early fall until mid-winter.



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HOW FLW LIVE WORKS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT PACE

It takes a skilled crew and a well-engineered system to broadcast live from remote fishing destinations in any weather conditions. Thankfully, FLW has the best crew in the business running *FLW Live*. Here's how we make it happen.

► ON THE WATER



GOPROS

FLW rigs a GoPro camera in each pro's boat on the final two days. The highlights are later stitched into the live program.



PHOTOGRAPHERS

FLW's photographers are more than just "camera guys." They're expert photojournalists, and they provide much of the commentary and reporting that support online tournament coverage.



CAMERAMEN

Video feeds are broadcast right from the cameras to the production studio. No matter the weather, this crew is out there, and the cameras are rolling.



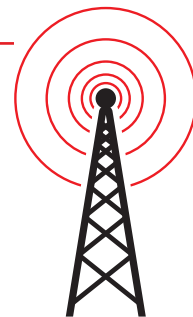
DRONE

The drone provides another perspective by giving fans an overhead view of grass beds, shorelines and the best fishing areas on the fisheries that the Tour visits.



MARSHALS

Marshals provide up-to-date weight estimates and fish-catch reports on the final two days. They also capture photos and videos for online tournament coverage.



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▶ IN THE STUDIO



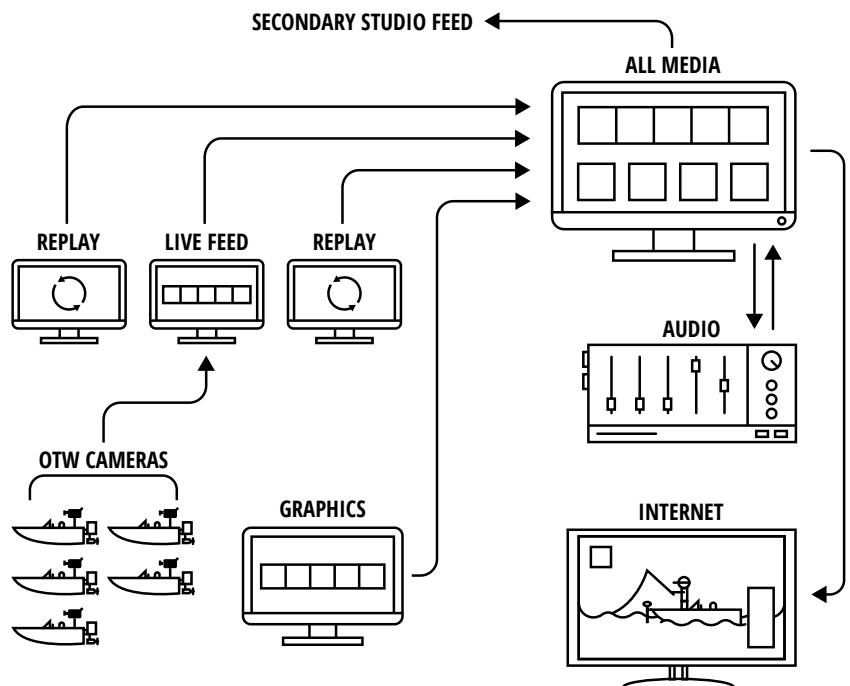
ON SET

The primary *FLW Live* set is located at FLW's operations headquarters in Benton, Ky. It's where hosts Travis Moran and Rob Newell, along with the entire production crew, put together the best live fishing show in the business. A second remote set was used at the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup in Columbia, S.C.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Broadcasting *FLW Live* requires a team effort. A producer manages the entire operation, giving direction to the cameramen and hosts, as well as the video editors, sound engineers and graphics producers who ensure the quality of the video stream and piece together supporting content such as fish-catch clips and the leaderboard.

As video feeds stream in, a switcher controls which shot gets beamed to the world, while the IT support staff makes sure that everything runs smoothly.



▶ AT HOME

AT HOME OR ON THE GO

FLW Live can be viewed for free just about anywhere on a smartphone, computer or tablet. It airs on the final two days of every FLW Tour event, and each day of the Forrest Wood Cup. Check it out at FLWFishing.com. ■





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THE PRAIRIE PRO

CASEY SCANLON DOESN'T HAIL FROM THE HEART OF BASS FISHING COUNTRY, BUT HE FISHES LIKE A NATIVE SON

By Colin Moore

PHOTOS BY STEVE GUM

Casey Scanlon is an uncommonly good bass fisherman who grew up in Kansas. It might seem contradictory that a pro of his caliber would hail from a state that otherwise doesn't rate a very large blip on the bass fishing radar screen, but it happens. There was that former bricklayer from the prairie town of Seward, Neb., who made it big. What was his name? Oh, yeah ... Denny Brauer.

They're both kindred spirits from beyond the bass fishing heartland who proved to be naturals, so it's no wonder Brauer is a longtime favorite of Scanlon's. However, it goes much deeper than that. Given the right circumstances, Scanlon patterns his fishing after Brauer, picking apart wood cover and grass or the dark recesses under docks with jigs. Scanlon did some of that in 2017, but also some of the crankbaiting techniques that his other idol, Rick Clunn, was good at. Applying the best lessons of both of his heroes, Scanlon was able to place 20th in the FLW Tour yearly standings and earned \$60,500.

Scanlon's hopes of finishing higher in the regular season were dashed in the last two tournaments, when he ended up 136th on one of his favorite fisheries, the Mississippi River, and 75th on the Potomac River. Still, the 33-year-old turned some heads in the 2017 season, which was topped by his eighth-place showing at Lake Cumberland. Overall, he's scored five top-10 performances in 38 FLW tournaments, including two each at Truman Lake and Lake of the Ozarks in T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League events.

A Self-Starter

If anyone can lay claim to being a self-made angler, it's Scanlon. His interest in fishing began at a small creek that ran near the suburban Kansas City

home where he was raised. Both his grandfathers were fishermen, and they showed him how to rig up for bluegills and catfish. More importantly, he was able to catch fish because of what they taught him, and the fun that success entailed was all the motivation he needed.

"I was about 10 years old when I really got hooked on bass fishing," recalls Scanlon. "I remember the exact day. There was this cool pond near Marysville [Kansas], and I had rigged up an old Luck E Strike ringworm. I caught a bunch of bass out of the lily pads along the bank, and I thought, 'Man, this is great.' That really got me going. Later, my dad [John Scanlon] would help me lash an aluminum boat on the top of his 1983 Buick LeSabre, take me to a pond, let me fish all day, and then come back and get me.

We scratched the heck out of that Buick, but to my dad it was way more important that I got to go fishing."

More opportunities converged for Scanlon as he grew older. When he was 15 and a high school freshman, he read an article in a local magazine about a Kansas City bass club. He called the contact listed and asked if he could join, even though he didn't have a driver's license, much less a tournament-worthy boat. Fortunately for him, the club welcomed him, and he fished his first event on Lake of the Ozarks.

"It was cold and snowing, but I caught a 7 1/2-pounder on a custom-painted [Smithwick] Rogue and won. I was on top of the world," he recalls. "A high school principal gave me the Rogue, and to this day I still carry it in one of my tackle boxes.



Simple, yet effective, a jig and crankbait are Scanlon's go-to lure choices around the country.



“Back then, there weren’t any high school fishing tournaments, and it was a rarity in that part of the country to see a kid fishing in a tournament,” notes Scanlon. “The high school principal, the bass club guys – they were mentors who took me under their wing. They saw that I really wanted to fish and that I wasn’t just going to be a pain in the butt. As much as anybody, they taught me how to fish different lakes and learn a bunch of different techniques.”

Scanlon learned such lessons well. Bankrolled for a time by the landscaping business he and a friend owned, Scanlon won a number of local and regional tournaments, and in 2011 fished some Bassmaster Opens that were within easy travelling distance. He did so well in them that he qualified to fish the Bassmaster Elite Series, where he stayed until he switched to the FLW Tour last spring.

Settling In

Golf, guiding and a smattering of Missouri tournaments keep Scanlon occupied during the off-season. He’s lived near Lake of the Ozarks for the past four years, and his guide service

gets a lot of repeat business in the fall. He and a buddy, Travis Perret, also have a jig company named Trophy Bass Company, and they spend much of the winter catching up on orders and restocking their inventory.

Otherwise, Scanlon says he spends most of his time reading bass fishing magazines, watching television shows, or visiting various websites and social media outlets devoted to the sport. Scanlon doesn’t just immerse himself in YouTube and Facebook videos for the entertainment value. Like a lot of others, he’s come to realize that versatility is one of the keys to a long career. Growing up fishing the Ozark lakes has given him a head start in that regard, but he admits he has a lot more to learn.

“My favorite things to do are to flip a jig or fish a square-bill crankbait. If I could lay just two rigs out on my deck and fish with them all day, one would be rigged with a jig and the other a crankbait,” notes Scanlon. “Having said that, it seems like I spent half my tournaments this year with a spinning outfit in my hands. A lot of times you don’t get to fish the way you’re most comfortable with – or at least you don’t if you want to succeed.”

Take a Memo

Many tournament pros have their own special idiosyncrasies – special lures, morning rituals, lucky charms. One of Scanlon’s quirks is to write notes to himself on pieces of masking tape and post them where he’s sure to notice them at some point in a competition day. Most often, the ersatz bulletin boards in his boat are the screens of four sonar head units he has mounted at the console and bow. And just as often, the message is to remind him to avoid fishing too fast.

“Message No. 1 is ‘Slow Down, Fish More Thoroughly,’” says Scanlon. “It’s right there on my fish finder, and I see it every time I look at the screen. I have a tendency to fish really fast. Slowing down is something I have to force myself to do, but it usually helps, especially when I’m not getting a lot of bites.”

“I’m at a level where you don’t have coaches or somebody looking over your shoulder and saying you need to do this or that. You have to figure things out for yourself,” says one who’s used to doing just that. “That’s the tough part, but that’s also the most rewarding part when everything comes together because you did it right.” ■



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5 BOAT-SELLING TIPS

HOW TO MAXIMIZE YOUR CHANCES AND YOUR PROFIT
WHEN IT'S TIME TO PART WITH YOUR OLD RIG

By Joe Balog

PHOTOS BY D.W. REED II

Dreaming of a new boat? Want to upgrade from your current rig? You're not alone.

If you're like most of us, however, you'll first need to sell your current boat. And while that might seem simple enough, selling a bass boat in today's market is anything but.

Many boats are put up for sale every year, often flooding the market and making it tough to get a good price for used rigs.

Considering these tips can help get your old boat sold quickly.

1. Recognize the Challenges

First, the best way to reach your buyer is to understand the unique nature of the bass boat market. High-performance bass boats represent a niche market: They don't appeal to the masses, but are still aggressively sought by a dedicated group of buyers.

In addition, pro and demo rigs get turned over each season, increasing the number of boats of the previous model

year that are on the market when they go on sale. These boats are priced significantly lower than new boats, and often outfitted well.

The result is a used boat market with many choices for nicely rigged, low-hour watercraft. The key lies in understanding your competition and separating your boat from the masses.

2. Clean and Fix

Start with a thorough cleaning and waxing. In some cases, it's best to have the boat professionally detailed. Although this first step can be costly, those in the business have all the necessary tools to access every nook and cranny of your rig.

Don't forget the overlooked items when cleaning. Seats and the boat's cover are frequently disregarded. Jack plates, shallow-water anchors, trailer winches and jacks, trolling motor mounts; each can be made to look like new with the proper cleaning solutions, and that goes a long way in overall appeal.

Next, repair anything that needs it. Don't allow a potential buyer to pass over your boat for something as simple as a livewell pump that doesn't work, or a depth finder that won't read bottom. That sends a bad message and will often kill a deal.

Another tip: Invest in new add-ons where needed. For example, while purchasing a new GPS might not be an option, the mount that holds that GPS could be in need of replacement, and a new one would dress up the entire unit. The same goes for a new trolling motor mount or transom saver on the outboard.

3. Advertise Like a Pro

Once everything is spit-shined, it's time to photograph the boat. This is often what separates you from your competitors. A quick glance at the leading online boat sale sites reveals the truth: Most photos stink. They're out of focus, poorly lit or just don't show a lot. Those are quickly passed over, regardless of the quality of the boat being advertised.

Start by choosing a good background, the best being lake-side. Position your boat where it glistens in the late-day sun with a pretty lake as the background, and you're in business. If the lake looks "bassy," all the better. You want a potential buyer to immediately equate your boat with a good fishing experience.

Be sure to capture a photo of the full side of the boat, as well as angles from front and back. A real eye-catcher is a photo of the keel and hull from down low – almost ground level. Rear photos concentrating on the outboard are also particularly appealing to a bass boat crowd in love with speed.

Once overview photos are generated, be sure to snap several shots of the boat's interior, as well as key pieces of equipment such as depth finders (with clean screens) and shallow-water anchors. These items are often the final key in a sale.

With photos in hand, it's time to advertise. While word of mouth and good salesmanship were once keys, today it's all about the internet. Nearly all of today's shoppers consult top online sales sites before making a purchase, so you're guaranteed your boat will get viewed if you post it on such a site.

For the bass boat market, nothing tops bassboatcentral.com. The sites probass.net and iboats.com also do well. In addition,

numerous national giants such as boattrader.com get good traffic due to their huge reach. Some are free; others require a fee that's usually well worth the money. Sign up, check the sites frequently and reply to questions and emails from potential buyers as soon as they come in.

Finally, knowing when to advertise is also important. The vast majority of used boats sales occur in early spring, and nearly none are sold from Thanksgiving through the first of the year.

4. Price the Rig Reasonably

Determining a price for your used boat is one of the most important factors in generating a sale. The initial price must be realistic and competitive, as starting high and coming down is a sign of trouble to buyers who often monitor ads for weeks.

As a rule, compare your boat's potential asking price to that of others of the same year with the same outboard make, and don't overestimate the value of add-ons. You might have paid thousands for the latest high-tech graphs, for example, but they aren't as valuable to the next buyer, and only contribute a small percentage to the overall value of a used boat. In addition, buyers will often use those features as an angle when haggling price, so it's important to remain flexible with regard to options. Swallowing the cost might be necessary to make the deal.

5. Be Accommodating

When it comes time to show your boat to a potential buyer, be prepared to sell. Make yourself available for a viewing, and do so in a clean, well-lit area. Have a definitive bill of sale for both parties when the time comes, and only release titles or MSOs (manufacturer's statement of origin) when payment clears to avoid fraud. If paperwork needs to be mailed, do so with tracking and signature of receipt required for all items.

With buyers more educated than ever and large numbers of used bass boats going on the market every spring, selling can be tough. Separate yourself from the competition, and remain professional and accountable throughout the transaction.

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WHAT'S INSIDE: DUEL'S BUDGET-PRICED GLIDE BAIT IS A WINNER

A new, better way to
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A look at Ranger's latest,
along with other recent
product releases



DUEL HARDCORE NINJA TWITCH'N GLIDER

By Matt Williams

PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

It's no secret that big glide baits will catch some of the biggest bass in the lake when the conditions are right. Sort of like it's well known that you can unload some serious bucks on a handmade, hand-tuned beauty built with top-shelf components and finished with a paint job so pretty you might be reluctant to throw it for fear of scarring it up.

No need to worry with the Duel Hardcore Ninja Twitch'n Glider, which delivers many of the same qualities as a premium glide bait for a fraction of the price.

First Impression

The Twitch'n Glider has a large-profile 7-inch bait-fish body and features a single joint that pivots on a pair of stainless rings and pins to form a heavy-duty double hinge. First

impression: This bait is built to take a serious beating.

While the flashy finishes appear above average in quality, there isn't much detail to speak of other than a broken scale pattern that runs along the edge of the back and belly, raised gill plates and 3-D eyes.

Duel mounts a pair of sticky black nickel Japanese trebles and split rings to the belly. A rigid line tie protrudes just beneath the nose, while a replaceable tail section made from pliable rubber brings up the rear. A spare tail is included in case the original gets damaged.

In Action

Some glide baits are so big and heavy that they can be daunting to throw for long periods. Yet to me the Twitch'n Glider's medium

size made it a true pleasure to fish with. In fact, when I tried it I found it to be somewhat addictive because it can be made to perform a variety of enticing actions by altering the retrieve speed or changing the rod position and rod cadence. In clear water, I could actually see how it reacted to even the subtlest cue.

The bait sinks very slowly with a near-horizontal posture and swims with an S-shaped gliding action, which causes it to swing methodically 12 to 14 inches side-to-side on a slow, steady retrieve. Varying the retrieve by pausing, sweeping the rod or "walking" the lure with a jerk-bait-like cadence will cause the bait to dart or drift outside its original path and will sometimes trigger followers that might not commit otherwise. If you

really want to get nasty, snap the rod tip sharply and stop reeling. The bait will spin 180 degrees and look a potential attacker in the eye.

Final Thoughts

Whether you are new to glide bait fishing or an accomplished big-bait angler, the Twitch'n Glider is certainly worth a look. The bait is well made, and its slow-sinking nature makes it a great choice for clear, shallow-water applications around docks, laydowns, grass flats, grass edges and other ambush points where big bass will sometimes set up camp and wait for unsuspecting forage to swim by. It's not a numbers bait by any means, but it will draw the attention of medium and large fish and trigger some violent strikes along the way.

REMOVABLE TAIL SECTION

It's made from durable rubber but can wear or tear over time. Duel provides one replacement tail with each bait. An elongated tab on the tail fits snugly into a rectangular slot. Just slide the original tail up and out, and press the new one in until it locks in place.



HEAVY-DUTY JOINT

Body halves are joined with durable steel components to avoid breakage and allow the bait to flex and swim appropriately for the best action.



CAREFUL WEIGHTING

Though it weighs 2 5/8 ounces, the bait is engineered to sink slower than a weightless wacky worm so it can be fished slowly through the upper water column and paused or twitched around targets.



Performance Advice

Though not as heavy as some of the other glide baits out there, at 2 5/8 ounces the Twitch'n Glider is still a fairly big bait that calls for a rod with some backbone and length and a reel with some guts.

Based on my experience, here's what I recommend.

Rod: Stick with something close to 8 feet long with a heavy action rated for lines of 20-pound test and heavier. The rod should have a slow taper and fast action so it loads well for making long casts and giving the bait some action while providing enough cushion to keep fish hooked up. I threw it on a Lew's Custom Speed Stick Series SuperDuty 3, which is a 7-foot, 11-inch, fast-action rod, and it performed nicely.

Reel: Your best bet is to upsize to a reel with extra line capacity, stout gears, oversized handle/grips and fairly slow gear ratio to help winch big fish to the boat. The longer you play a fish on a big glide bait, the more chance it has to come unbuttoned. The Shimano Calcutta Conquest 300 series (5.6:1) is perfect, as is the new low-profile Shimano Tranx.

Line: Personal preference should factor into your line choice, but consider that fluorocarbon is the heavy favorite among glide bait junkies because of its limited stretch and low visibility in clear water. Lines in the 20- to 25-pound-test range get the call most often. You can throw it on braid with a long leader, but you have to be really careful of backlashes that can cause the line to come tight and the heavy bait to snap the line and sail into the lake.

HITS & MISSES

- + Good price point
- + Built-in S-shaped gliding action on a steady retrieve
- + Easy-to-achieve varied actions, including 180-degree turns
- + Heavy-duty construction
- + Replaceable tail section
- + Excellent color variety
- + Quality hooks
- A split ring at the line tie would be nice

APPLICATIONS

- Target clear water, since bass home in on the Twitch'n Glider mostly by sight. It will draw strikes over deep water if clarity is extremely high.
- Wind it parallel to docks, grass lines and shady edges, or over submerged grass, rocky points, boulders and other ambush points.
- Key on periods when big numbers of fish gravitate to the shallows, such as spring and fall, especially on lakes known for producing large bass.
- Use it as a search bait. Glide baits are known for drawing out followers that you might not otherwise see. Though they don't always commit, the fish will reveal their locations.

DETAILS

Length: 7 inches

Colors: 10

MSRP: \$39.99

Weight: 2 5/8 ounces

Depth: 1 to 2 feet

Contact: yo-zuri.com ■

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CUSTOM MAPPING WITH C-MAP GENESIS

By Curtis Niedermier

CHART CONTOUR LINES, BOTTOM HARDNESS AND GRASS BED LOCATIONS

If there's one knock on most modern digital mapping tools used for fishing during the last decade, it's that the information on the maps is available to anyone willing to pay for it. There are no secrets on the maps, and everyone lined up at tournament takeoff has the same contour lines at their disposal. Plus, some mapping programs are less-than-complete, even for well-trafficked major fisheries.

In short, there's no competitive advantage available to anglers who are willing to go above and beyond.

Several companies have tried to buck that trend with software and hardware packages that can draw custom "sonar maps" on a depth finder's screen. While several of those are perfectly capable and valuable tools, particularly for finding isolated boulders and the like, they usually still require that the user be adept at interpreting sonar information because the "map" is more or less a collage of sonar returns.

Another solution is a user-generated mapping program that converts sonar information to the type of contour line maps that most bass anglers are familiar with and allows anglers to create their own maps. Several companies have flirted with the concept, but perhaps none has figured it out as well as C-Map Genesis. The company, which partners with Lowrance on its mapping system, offers anglers several valuable tools. The first is a cache of crowd-sourced map data generated by other users that paints a very accurate, up-to-date picture of the bottom of many lakes, rivers and reservoirs in the country. The second is the ability to create custom GPS maps of any fishery, with overlaid bottom hardness and vegetation information.

The custom mapping, in particular, has some serious advantages for tournament anglers who need to decipher patterns quickly and line up on prime spots more efficiently. Complete details are available at genesismap.com.

How C-Map Makes Maps

According to Greg Huff, business acquisition and marketing manager at C-Map Genesis, the system converts depth, bottom hardness and vegetation information from "vertical" sonar returns – both traditional sonar and DownScan – into flat, "overhead" maps.

"When you're looking at your 2-D broadband sonar display on the water, you can tell if there's a hard bottom or a soft bottom based on whether it has a thick or thin line," says Huff. "Because of the way sonar works, it'll bounce off a hard bottom faster. It'll bounce off a soft bottom slower. Your depth finder translates that into colors on the screen. You'll sometimes see a double echo on a really, really hard bottom. A bigger indicator is going to be the thick yellow line for a hard-bottom area, and a thinner yellow line for soft bottom.

"With that information, you may know there's a hard bottom under the boat, but you don't know how far it goes or how it relates to the structure nearby. When you can actually see those areas, the size and the shape of them, that's a really powerful tool, especially for pre-fishing."

The latter is exactly what C-Map accomplishes.

"The people that invented this technology figured out how to take that same data for not only depth contours, but hardness, too, and instead of a vertical view like on a sonar

screen, created a horizontal view on a map," Huff says. "It's taking the exact same signal that you've always seen on a sonar display to a map view."

The system "picks up" vegetation information as well, though it only maps vegetation when at least 20 percent of the water column is comprised of grass. Short carpets of grass won't register.

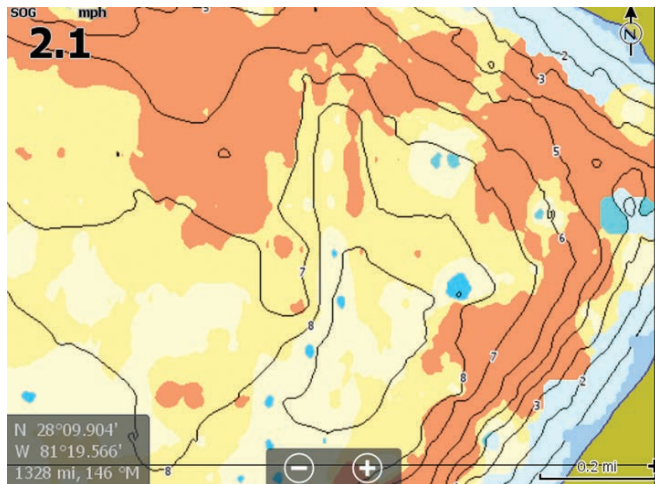
Social Mapping

The foundation of the C-Map Genesis system is "social mapping," which is the company's term for crowd-sourced map data.

How it works is an angler records sonar data while on the water using any Lowrance HDS Gen2 or newer unit, including the Elite Ti series, uploads that information to a cloud-based system, and then the information is compiled with other users' data to create more detailed maps.

Through C-Map Genesis, any angler can create a free account and have access to the complete Social Map database. Just sign up for the Genesis Social membership, slip an SD or Micro-SD card (depending on which type your sonar unit accepts) into a computer, and download the maps. Pop the card in the depth finder to pull up the maps.

Creating a new map is simple, too, by punching a three-button sequence. The Lowrance will record the data, which can then be uploaded to the Social Map site. The system converts the information to a map for the user to download back onto the card and use, but it becomes available to other users as well.



Private, Premium Mapping Options

If you're not willing to share your mapping info with other anglers (and who could blame you?), C-Map Genesis offers an alternative in its Genesis Edge program, which costs \$99 per year or \$14.99 per month.

Genesis Edge allows users to download the same crowd-sourced maps and contribute new information if they desire. But Genesis Edge subscribers can also choose to keep their custom-made maps private. The other big advantages are the bottom hardness and vegetation maps, which aren't available with the free membership. They show anglers important transition areas, edges and structures for positioning the boat just right for casts.

Huff, an avid angler himself, has tapped into both bottom hardness and vegetation mapping with good success on lakes spanning from Florida to Minnesota.

HOW TO MAP: START RECORDING

1. Insert an SD or Micro-SD card into the depth finder head unit, and bring up the chart.
2. Select "Chart options."
3. Select "Advanced."
4. Select "Record sonar."
5. A red flashing dot indicates that the unit is recording.

"I'm so spoiled now because I can hardly launch the boat without it," he says. "Every time you make a cast, you know you're actually throwing to something that might have a fish on it."

"Let's say you're in Florida, and you're going along a whole bunch of yards and yards and yards of weed edges, and there's one little area that's a shell bed," says Huff. "Sometimes it might just be the size of a boat, and then it's surrounded by muck or sand or something like that. Those little spots will stick out on your bottom hardness map."

Instead of casting toward a waypoint on a shell bed, the map shows the outline of the shell bed, so the angler can position the boat via GPS for a pitch or cast to any part of the structure. It works the same way in mucky, mud-bottom lakes – with hard-bottom rock veins and the like standing out.

In deeper grass lakes, rather than having to hover over the edge of a deep grass bed to make accurate presentations, now you can graph the grass edge first and have a perfect picture of the points, cuts and other features.

It's also helpful for patterning fish. For example, bass might be situated on hard-bottom points in a particular depth range, or on shell beds along the edge of a grass bed, or on points on the outside edge of a weedline. With the map, those types of spots are obvious.

And in spring or fall, the maps help highlight transition pathways in reservoirs, where bass might leave spawning areas and follow a series of points, channels, rocky banks or grass beds into deeper water. The combination of contours, hardness and vegetation on the map paints a complete picture if the entire area has been scanned.

"For small lakes I would use the Genesis map the entire time if it's a complete map," adds Huff. "If I go to Mille Lacs [or any large lake], and the entire lake doesn't have Genesis data, but a lot of the best spots do, I'd switch to a more complete map for navigation, basically any time I have my big motor running, but when I stand up to go on my trolling motor I'd switch to my Genesis map."

Color Gradation

C-Map Genesis "shows" its users important information using colors and shades. For instance, the darker the shade of blue, the deeper the water. Grass, logically, shows up as green. And bottom hardness ranges from dark orange for the hardest bottom to lighter orange, tan and pale yellow for the softest bottom.

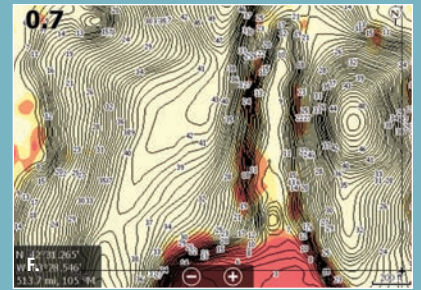
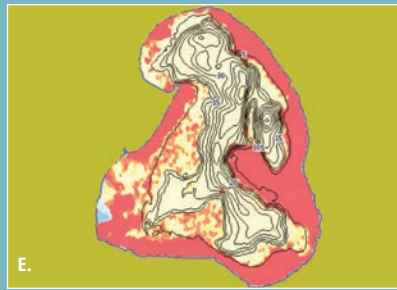
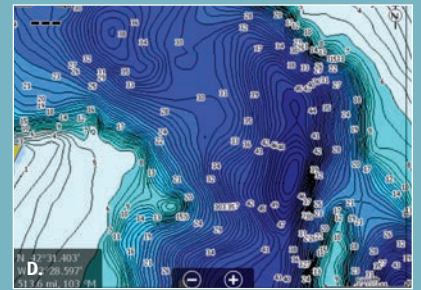
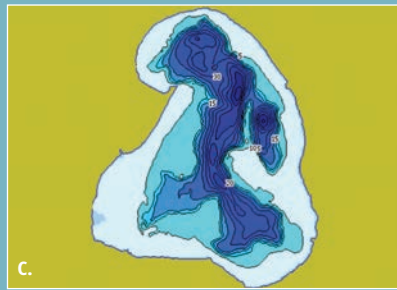
Users can also highlight specific depth ranges on their Lowrance units, which is handy for avoiding dangerous shallow obstructions or quickly dialing in on a specific zone throughout a fishery. The depth shading is also handy for locating shallow areas with deep access nearby, which is a common productive scenario at certain times of year.



A C-MAP CASE STUDY

Huff shared an example of a lake map created by a Lowrance pro-staffer for Walled Lake in Michigan. The images show how the lake was scanned, as well as the resulting contour, bottom hardness and vegetation maps. Google Earth imagery shows an overhead view of the lake, and some of the underwater features are even visible in the clear water, so you can see how those features are displayed on the final maps.

This sequence of photos displays the capabilities of the C-Map system, as well as the result of using Huff's suggested method for charting lakes.



KEYS TO CREATING QUALITY CHARTS

1. 9 to 10 mph speed is ideal for creating bottom hardness and vegetation charts.
2. You must travel less than 20 mph to create standard contour maps.
3. In most cases, graphing in back-and-forth passes 40 to 50 yards apart produces the best results. The system will extrapolate information for the areas in between passes.
4. If complete coverage is desired, space passes 25 yards apart. "If you are in a lake that's known for having really, really crazy bottom, like some of those glacial lakes where there are rock piles every 2 feet, do a really tight grid," says Huff. "If you're in Florida you don't have to be quite as extreme."

TIME MANAGEMENT

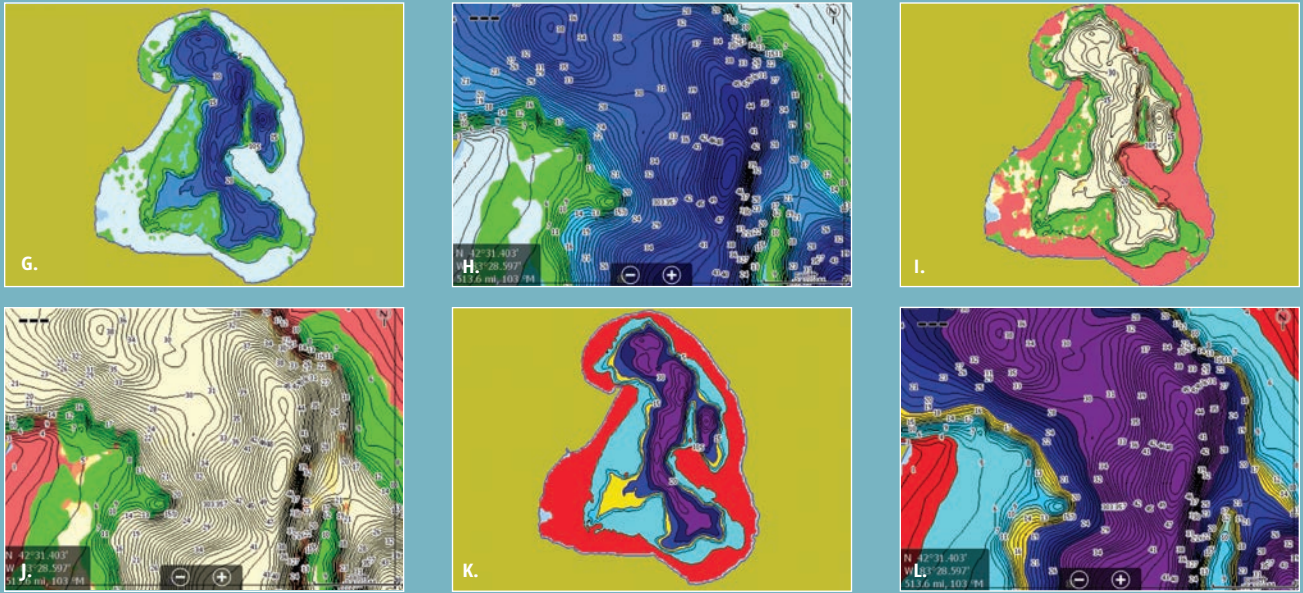
According to Huff, C-Map Genesis is working on a live mapping program that'll convert sonar information directly into contour, hardness and vegetation maps on the screen as it is gathered. The technology should be available sometime in early 2018.

That'll solve one of the only hang-ups that some traveling tournament pros might have with the system – that they have to spend time graphing, then upload content and then download the data later. Usually, that requires heading back to the bank and accessing the web with a computer and a strong wireless signal, though not always, depending on your depth finder model and wi-fi connection.

"It's not plug-and-play. It's for people who want an extra edge and are willing to put in a little extra time," says Huff. "We're trying to get it closer to plug-and-play, and the live will help with that."

Likewise, Huff suggests that anglers incorporate the process into their tournament practice and pre-practice strategies, especially when they're spending hours graphing anyway.

"You have to be wise with your time. On those giant reservoirs people just graph the stuff that's fishable," Huff says. "If everybody who goes out for a tournament practice would just simply push those three buttons and record all the areas they are graphing, they are going to do so much better in the tournament. Graphing with sonar shows you where the fish are that day, but mapping shows you where they might have gone when they're not there anymore."



A. Walled Lake is a small natural lake in Michigan, with clear water and shallow weedbeds. The shallower zones and weeds are partially visible via Google Earth. B. The zigzag method of charting a lake ensures full coverage of every contour and detail. C. The resulting contour map. The darker the blue, the deeper the water. D. Close-ups of the 1-foot contours on the map. E. The bottom hardness map shows the areas with hardest bottom in dark orange, areas that transition from hard to soft in lighter orange and soft-bottom areas in tan. F. Close-up of hard-bottom transitions. G. The vegetation map. H. Close-up of vegetation map detail. I. The vegetation and hardness maps overlaid together. J. Close-up of vegetation and hardness map details. K. An example of the depth shading feature being used to highlight multiple depth ranges. L. Close-up of the depth shading feature.

>> STRATEGIC MAPPING TIPS

1. Charting Shallow Grassy Lakes

Vegetation thickness, type and growth stage impact how well the system can chart bottom content within a grass bed, but according to Huff, one of the best strategies for finding sweet spots in shallow grassy lakes such as in Florida is to zigzag over flats in the winter, when vegetation growth is minimal, and record bottom content information then. Save the location of those key shell beds or shoals for later, when they're not so apparent because of grass growth.

2. Lotsa Charting

If you're mapping a large area – say an entire remote lake in northern Michigan, a small reservoir in Arkansas or a creek arm on a Tennessee River reservoir – Huff suggests recording in hour-long bursts, rather than recording one track for an entire morning or afternoon. The shorter clips will upload and process faster, and they can be stitched into a map on the Social Map software program before downloading.

3. Mapping Creek Channels

The most accurate method for charting creek channels is to follow the path of the creek using a commercially available map, or the pre-loaded maps on Lowrance units. Scan one edge of the channel, make a return pass up the middle of the channel and finish by scanning the other edge.

4. Perpendicular Passes

If you uncover something interesting, it can be helpful to scan it again from a perpendicular angle to determine its complete size and shape.

GET HELP, STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

If you want to learn how to operate any function of C-Map or your Lowrance unit, odds are you can get your questions answered at Greg Huff's blog at insight-genesis.wordpress.com. Huff has documented samples of C-Map depth, hardness and vegetation returns to help users understand and interpret the data, and he's created step-by-step tutorials for basic functions. There are even hypothetical examples of how a tournament angler might use the system to his or her advantage. ■

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Ranger Boats Z500 Comanche L Series

New for 2018 is the Ranger Z500 Comanche L Series, available in the Z520L (20 feet, 9 inches) and Z521L (21 feet, 7 inches) models. The L Series is built on the previous Z500 Comanche hull, but with new style lines and built-in features such as LED lighting and enlarged SRS suspension wrap-around seating. Up front, Ranger redesigned the bow workstation with new tool holders and space for flush-mounting up to 12-inch depth finder screens. Upgrades at the console include new digital keypads and space for up to a 16-inch electronics screen. Other improvements include additional USB ports, automated nav lights, and updated fenders and wheels on the Ranger Trail trailer.

rangerboats.com

Taipan Rods Elite Series

For the baitcasting rods in its Elite Series rod lineup, Taipan opted for “spiral wrap technology,” whereby the line guides wrap around the blank. At the tip, the line actually flows through the guides on the underside of the blank. Taipan says spiral wrapping reduces torque when fighting fish for a more natural rod bend, which results in better control and less wrist fatigue. Each is made with Fuji hardware and a custom Winn Grip wrap with raised seams and a tacky finish. Taipan manufactures its graphite blanks in house in the United States using what it calls Double Core X technology – a multi-ply construction method that results in a blank that maintains its round shape even under a heavy load for better durability and power. The standard series includes 12 baitcasting models and one spinning model. There are also four Signature Line models designed by Western pros Roy Hawk and Johnny Johnson. \$219.99 to \$249.99

taipanrods.com





Jason Mitchell Elite Series Rods

Jason Mitchell is an accomplished all-seasons hunting and fishing guide in South Dakota with a knack for new-product development, and he recently helped Clam Outdoors – a giant of the ice fishing industry – launch a new lineup of open-water rods called the Jason Mitchell Elite Series. Included in the series are five casting models and six spinning models that have bass fishing applications. They come with split cork grips and Fuji components on high-modulus graphite blanks. \$139.99

clamoutdoors.com

Zoom Boot Tail Fluke

Combine a Zoom Fluke and a Zoom Swimmer and the result is the 5-inch Boot Tail Fluke, which is a solid-bodied swimbait that is loaded with action yet tough enough to stand up to a lot of strikes. The Boot Tail Fluke can be fished solo with a jighead or weighted hook, as a trailer, or used in an umbrella rig. It's available in five popular colors, in packages of five. \$5.49

zoombait.com



Coast FL75R

The Coast FL75R has a rechargeable lithium battery pack (it also runs on standard alkaline batteries) and is rated to run on high for two hours and 15 minutes. The LED beam is adjustable for distance and output and can reach more than 500 feet. Five colors are available, with matching adjustable headbands, and the entire unit weighs only 3.2 ounces. \$105

coastportland.com



Greenfish Tackle Ploppin' Toad Toter

The staff at Greenfish Tackle has designed the new Ploppin' Toad Toter, a wire-bait contraption that combines the *plop-plop-plop* action made popular recently by the River2Sea Whopper Plopper with a single-hook, buzzbait-style frame. To rig it, slide your favorite toad up over the lead head, which has two barbs to help keep the toad in place. The single hook should stand up through the legs. Up front, a colored float helps the bait track properly, and the single blade provides much of the action. \$6.49

greenfishtackle.com



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PHOTO BY MARTI PAGE

NO FLASH, NO PROBLEM

THE SUBTLE SPYBAIT
DOESN'T NEED A
LOT OF ADDED
ACTION TO FOOL
FISH INTO BITING

By Tyler Brinks

Spybaiting has been dubbed the technique of silent capture. It's a novel approach to bass fishing that goes against the grain of conventional techniques, relying on a very subtle lure presentation with almost no built-in action to attract bites.

Spybaiting has made its mark in many tournaments over the past few years, but is still an untapped technique to many anglers. Recent tournament success has renewed interest in learning the technique. If you've wanted to try it, now's the time. Here's what you need to know about fishing spybaits.

What is "Spybaiting?"

The modern spybaiting technique, which originated about 10 years ago in Japan, involves the use of a small sinking lure that resembles a cross between a streamlined jerkbait and a prop bait. The elongated body has props on the front and rear, and once cast out and allowed to settle to the desired depth, it's slowly reeled back without any additional action. The technique is deadly for pressured bass when fished near the bottom.

Spybaiting bridges the gap between finesse fishing and power fishing. The small hard bait features treble hooks, yet is normally fished on light line and spinning tackle. Since it emerged in North America, it has become a favorite for anglers targeting smallmouth, largemouth and spotted bass in clear water.

The diminutive size of the hooks and spybaits themselves do not conjure up thoughts of big fish, but according to David Swendseid of DUO Realis, it is definitely a lure to catch large bass.

Swendseid is one of the pioneers of the technique in America and has used it with much success.

"It absolutely is a big-fish technique," says Swendseid. "Spybaits silently enter the zone of big fish. The bait just appears. It's not flashy or noisy like many lures, and big fish are naturally attracted to it and begin to follow."

Ideal Conditions

The spybaiting technique can be used in many conditions, but it seems to work best when targeting bass in clear water or in a fishery that is receiving heavy fishing pressure.

"This is a technique that can be used anywhere from 1 to 50 feet of water, and it really excels during bluebird skies," says Swendseid. "Generally, clear water is a benefit, but it will still work if the water has some color to it."

Michigan's Scott Dobson, who used the technique to help him win the 2016 Costa FLW Series Northern Division event on 1000 Islands, adds that he will only use the technique in gin-clear water.

"The clearer the better," Dobson says. "For me, this is a smallmouth technique, and they are visual feeders and need to be able to see it."

Dobson will generally begin spybaiting around the spawn and throughout the summer as long as the water stays warm.

"I pick it up once the water hits 60 degrees," he says. "Because, usually, you can catch fish better on a jerkbait or crankbait when the water is colder."

"If you are seeing fish chase a jerkbait or crankbait and not commit, that is when the spybait excels," he adds. "I like to fish it when the fishing gets tough, like during the postspawn period and in the hottest part of the summer."



Scott Dobson

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

How to Fish It

The technique is best when the bait is slowly reeled along the bottom. One of the major benefits of spybaiting is how well it draws fish from distances as the tiny props spin and create turbulence below the surface, contrary to many techniques in bass fishing that require the angler to rip, jerk, walk, twitch and generally impart all the lure's action with the rod.

A long cast and slow retrieve comprise the primary technique.

"Ideally, you should cast 30 feet beyond your target or ambush point, and then sneak it into where the fish should be positioned," says Swendseid.

After a cast he keeps his rod tip low to allow the spybait to sink faster.

"You want to let the bait sink to the depth," says Swendseid. "Watch for the line on the surface, and wait until all of the line is submerged, or the bait will be pulled up toward the surface when you retrieve."

"Fishing a spybait takes commitment," Dobson adds. "It is tedious to fish and takes time to fish it right and gain confidence in the technique. Each cast can take a few minutes if you're doing it correctly."

Dobson will typically fish in water between 15 and 20 feet deep, and prefers his bait to be within about 2 feet of the bottom, though some anglers will fish it a few feet higher, depending on the situation. To count the lure down, he estimates that it sinks 1 foot per second on a slack line.

"I will count it down by watching the seconds on the clock on my graph," he says. "This makes sure I'm counting correctly and that each cast is consistent when I'm catching fish."

Fish will even bite on the initial drop.

SPYBAIT MODELS

The DUO Realis Spinbait 80 and 90, as well as the DUO Realis G-Fix Spinbait 80, are the best known and most widely used spybaits, but there are other brands that offer similar baits.

Generally, the size can be matched to the size of the forage, but some pros will use the larger sizes for fishing deeper. Here's a look at the most common spybaits on the market, shown in actual size.



● Megabass X-Plose SS



● Jackall iProp 75S



● Lucky Craft Screw Pointer 80



● Lucky Craft Screw Pointer 90

"The DUO Realis Spinbait has a really good shimmy as it sinks, and most of the time they will bite it on the initial fall or right when you begin the retrieve," Dobson adds. "The other time you seem to get more bites is when the bait changes direction, like when you begin the ascent to the boat."

To test the action of the bait and get a better feel for how it performs, Swendseid advises pulling it alongside the boat to see how the props turn at different retrieve speeds.

"You want the props to barely become engaged," he says. "Reeling it too fast will pull the bait out of the target zone."

Line Selection

Line selection is critical for spybaiting. Most pros suggest using light fluorocarbon, or long leaders of fluorocarbon if using a braided main line. However, since braid floats, having too much braid out will affect a spybait's trajectory.

Dobson opts for high-visibility 10-pound-test PowerPro Maxcuatro braid with an 8-pound-test fluorocarbon leader.

"Surprisingly, many of the bites are really subtle, and the bright line helps you see the little 'ticks' when one grabs it," Dobson says.

Swendseid often goes even lighter, with 5-pound-test fluorocarbon or braid with 25 to 30 feet of fluorocarbon leader being optimal.

Gear Selection

Though most pros fish spybaits on spinning gear, there are models designed for fishing with baitcasting tackle (the DUO Realis G-Fix Spinbait 80, for instance), and some pros simply prefer to go that route.

"If you have a medium or medium-light spinning rod you use for fishing a drop-shot, it will work great for fishing a spybait," says Swendseid. "The faster the tip, the better."

Dobson uses a 7-foot, 4-inch, medium-action spinning rod for the DUO Realis Spinbait 80 and G-Fix Spinbait 80. For the larger and heavier size 90, he opts for a 7-foot, 6-inch, medium-heavy Doby's crankbait rod.

"A spybait is really not a finesse bait. It is a hard bait with two trebles, just like a crankbait or jerkbait," says Dobson. "I like to fish the Spinbait 90 on a crankbait rod and will set the hook hard."

"That rod is great because it bends throughout the whole blank, and with the small trebles on the bait, it keeps them hooked," he says.

Whether you classify the spybait as a finesse or power bait really is inconsequential. The way you fish it – as an "in-between" lure that's subtle, yet stays on the move – is what's really important, and in that regard the spybait is a productive tool that most bass anglers should consider learning to use.

A TIP TO AVOID A SNAG

The preferred method of most anglers who have experience with a spybait is to fish the lure very close to bottom, which can be intimidating for someone just learning the technique since the lure has treble hooks. Swendseid has a solution.

"Some people are scared to fish it right above the bottom because of the chance of losing the bait, but keeping it swimming just above the bottom is key," he says. "You can bend the bottom-facing treble points inward to prevent some snags." ■



● Storm Arashi Spinbait



● DUO Realis Spinbait 80



● DUO Realis Spinbait 90



● DUO Realis Spinbait 80 G-Fix

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RAPPIN' WINTER BASS



TARGET SUSPENDED, COLD-WATER FISH WITH ICE FISHING JIGGING BAITS

By Brent Frazee
PHOTO BY BRIAN LINDBERG

When cold winds sweep across Table Rock Lake and gray clouds spit snow, you won't find FLW pro Jeremy Lawyer at home on the couch. Instead, he's bundled up in heavy clothing, staring at his fish finder and "video gaming" deep, timber-dwelling bass on his electronics with a Turnback Shad, an example of the type of small, minnow-shaped jigging bait that previously was reserved for ice fishermen.

"These are definitely dead-of-the-winter types of baits," says Lawyer, 39, of Sarcoxie, Mo. "In these deep Ozarks reservoirs, the bass will suspend in the treetops of timber that might be in as much as 100 feet of water. These ice-fishing

baits are perfect for that type of fishing. They're heavy, so they drop quickly. And they dart around and glide just like a baitfish. A lot of times, bass will just smash them."

The technique once was a guarded secret in the Ozarks. Guides would go out in the dead of winter and catch keeper bass on Rapala Jigging Raps – regarded as the original ice-jigging bait – on reservoirs such as Table Rock, Lake of the Ozarks, Bull Shoals, Norfolk and Beaver.

But the word is out. Today, bass fishermen such as Lawyer consider the jigging baits to be among their "go-to" lures in the winter.

The Jigging Rap's Roots

When Rapala introduced the Jigging Rap in 1965, the well-known lure company had one target audience in mind: ice fishermen.

Little did company officials know that one day it would become one of the most successful open-water winter bass baits on the market.

"It had been primarily an ice-fishing lure until roughly 2010, when Al Lindner began telling the world about its effectiveness in open water for walleyes and smallmouths," says Dan Quinn, field promotions manager for Rapala USA. "That really helped to tell fishermen about its open-water applications and expand its use for bass fishing."

The bait became an attractive alternative to jigging spoons, which were and still are a popular way to catch bass in deep water.

But jigging spoons mostly flutter straight up and down when fished vertically. The Jigging Rap is presented vertically, but has the added advantage of darting and gliding erratically and enticingly when it is presented to either suspended or bottom-relating bass.

Today, there are many variations of the Jigging Rap on the market. Rapala has introduced the Snap Rap, which has a more exaggerated glide, and the heavy Flat Jig, better suited for fishing current and deep water.

Lawyer likes to fish the Turnback Shad, a bait made by Freedom Tackle that glides away from the angler when he snaps it. Others have found success with Northland's Puppet Minnow and Lunckerhunt's Straight Up Jig.

Lawyer's Favorite Scenario

Jigging baits are rapidly growing in popularity in regions such as the Ozarks, where clear, deep-water reservoirs provide an ideal setting for fishing them.

"I'll go into a creek, idle through there and look for the deep flooded timber," Lawyer says. "If you don't have at least 25 feet from the bottom of your boat to the top of the timber,

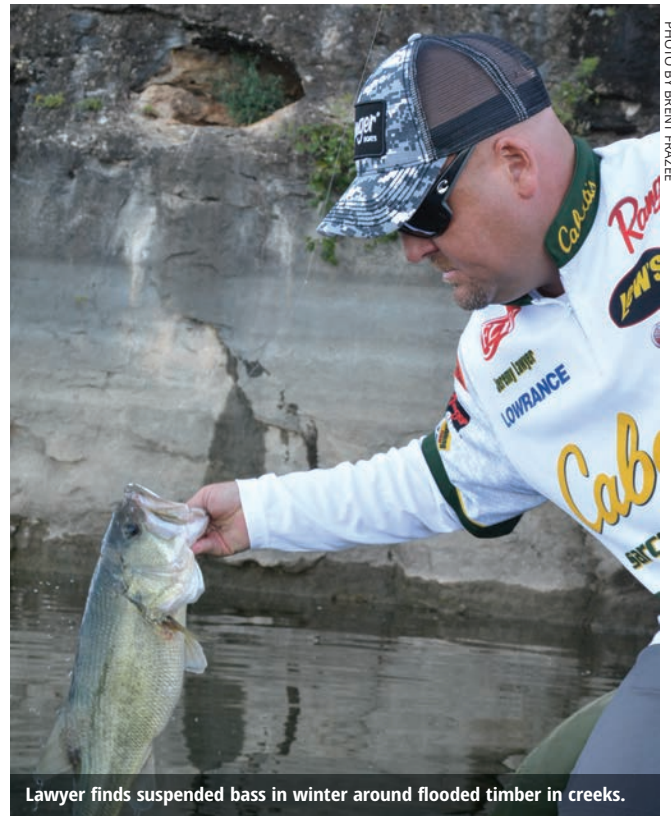


PHOTO BY BRENT FRAZEE

Lawyer finds suspended bass in winter around flooded timber in creeks.

it's not worth fishing. The bass will be in those treetops, waiting to ambush shad. And a lot of times, they'll be grouped up in the winter."

Still, Lawyer doesn't wait for his locator to light up like a pinball machine.

"I want to see bait there but not an overwhelming amount," he says. "I'm looking for a pod of baitfish, and maybe 10 to 15 fish around those baitfish. That's when I know I can get their attention."



Making Them Bite

For vertical fishing with jigging baits, the same is true whether on open water or the ice: An angler has to read the fish on electronics and “work” them with the lure. Most bass anglers call it video game fishing.

“I can drop that bait right in front of his nose and just dart it around,” says Lawyer, who gets a better view of the situation with a giant Lowrance HDS-16 Carbon depth finder.

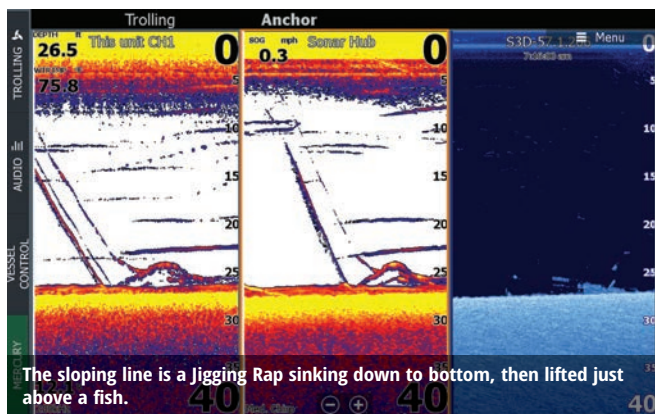
He fishes a jigging bait by snapping it up 12 to 24 inches, then allowing it to fall on a slack line.

“When the bait doesn’t fall after I’ve hopped it, it’s usually a fish and I’ll set the hook,” he says.

The technique is designed to get reaction strikes. Bass often bite on the initial drop or the first two or three snaps. If he hasn’t gotten a strike after roughly 10 snaps, Lawyer will reel up and try a different part of the treetop.

“Sometimes, all it takes is that bait hitting a limb and kicking up some algae or something for them to react and hit,” he adds. “When I can watch on my screen and see bass streak up to my bait, I know they’re in the right mood to bite.”

It’s also important not to cling to just one presentation. The snap method that Lawyer uses works when bass seem to be feeding actively, or when they are competing for food with several other fish in the same area. But he also has days when it takes a series of subtle twitches to get neutral bass to bite.



A Veteran Guide’s Approach

Lawyer learned about jigging baits such as the Jigging Rap from Pete Wenners, who has guided on the Ozark reservoirs since 1991. Wenners, who runs Pete’s Professional Guide Service, has been fishing a Jigging Rap for 20 years, and it remains one of his favorite cold-water baits.

“At one time, the Jigging Rap was pretty much a secret,” says Wenners, 62, who lives in Galena, Mo. “The guides down here and some of the locals knew about, but we kept it quiet.”

“The deep structure fish were more abundant then, and they didn’t get hit that hard because fishermen didn’t have all the electronics we do today. But these vertical baits will still work, especially when you can find the isolated, deep trees.”

Wenners prefers to use the 7/8-ounce size because it will drop more quickly than the lighter sizes, which improves efficiency when targeting bass in deep water. Yet he doesn’t get too aggressive, especially when fishing cold water. Instead, he just uses subtle twitches to get the bait to dart.

“You work them differently than a spoon,” he adds. “With the Jigging Raps, it’s more of a lift than a snap. I want it to fall on a semi-slack line instead of following the line down.”



IN THE SUMMER, TOO

Wenners uses the Jigging Rap primarily in cold water, but he catches bass on the bait in the heat of summer, too.

“When I get on a spoon bite in the summer, I’ll always change it up and go to a Jigging Rap,” he says. “Sometimes, that’s all it takes to trigger them.”

T-H Marine FLW Bass Fishing League angler Brad Leifermann can vouch for the Jigging Rap as a summertime lure, too.

The Minnesota angler has fished through the ice with the lure with great success, particularly for walleyes. Now, the Jigging Rap is an all-seasons bait for him. Back in June, at the BFL All-American on Pickwick, Leifermann uncovered a strong, though temporary, Jigging Rap pattern on the Tennessee River reservoir.

“I would idle around, looking for schools of white bass on structure,” he says. “Bass are like coyotes. They will let the white bass do all the work; then they come in under them and clean up.”

Unfortunately, conditions changed during the actual tournament, and Leifermann had to go to other techniques. It still reminded him that the Jigging Rap is more than just a winter bait, however.

“For the last five years, I’ve been fishing it a lot in open-water situations,” he says. “The way it darts around, it looks like the real thing.”

Leifermann prefers to use the 5/8-ounce Jigging Rap and has developed specialized methods for getting bass to hit it. He’ll use a series of short twitches as he slowly lifts the bait, sometimes right in front of the fish he sees on his sonar unit.

“They bite it like they’ve never seen it before,” he says. “It really is a fun bait to fish.”

Wenners will seldom let the bait sit still. When he sees several fish streak up to his Jigging Rap on his fish finder and they don't hit, he will slowly lift the lure to trigger a strike. If that doesn't work, experiment with sudden drops or lifts, or pause the bait dead still and read the fish's reaction on the graph.

Aggressive or subtle, the best presentation is usually revealed through trial and error. That's the great part about jigging baits. They can be fished slow and easy, with subtle twitches, lifts and pauses, or made to dart erratically with longer rod sweeps or harder jerks. The key is to locate bass in clear-water areas using electronics and take a stab at them. The fish might not be under ice, but this old ice fishing standby can still put them in the boat.

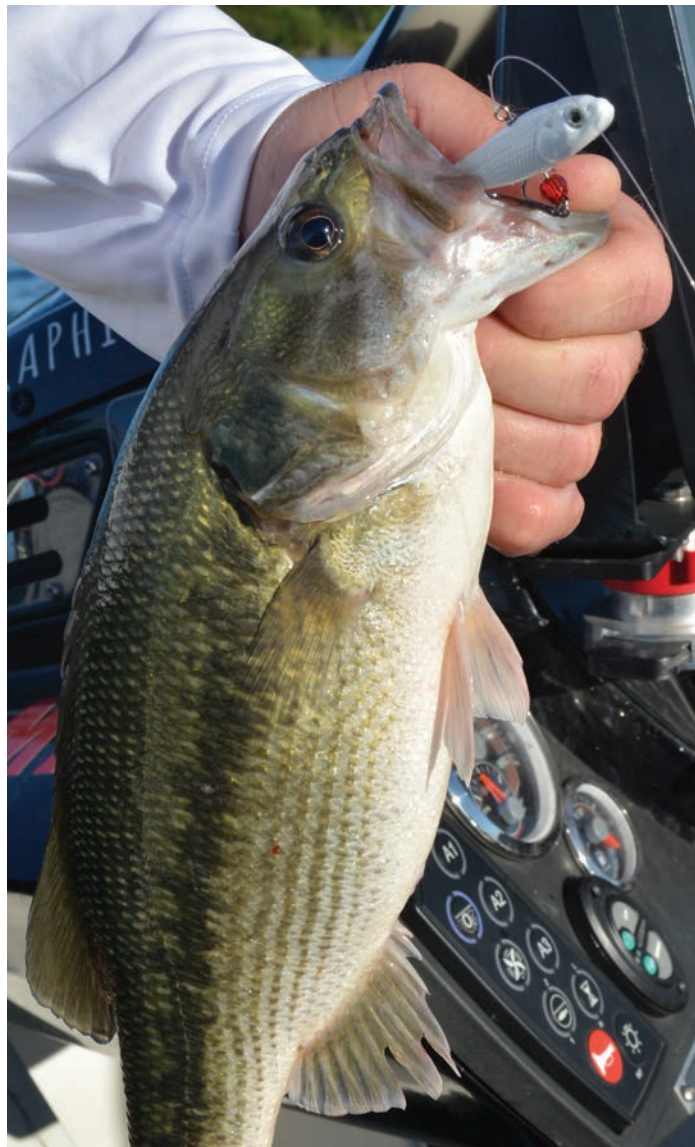


PHOTO BY BRENT FRAZEE



PHOTO COURTESY PETE WENNERS

Guide Pete Wenness believes a subtle approach is the best approach with a Jigging Rap.

NOT JUST FOR VERTICAL FISHING

Though the Jigging Rap and other baits like it are most commonly fished vertically for bass that have been pinpointed with electronics, that's not the only technique that works in open water. Casting and snap jigging are effective means of covering water, particularly for bottom-oriented bass.

When casting, let the lure hit bottom and work it back with a series of firm, yet short snaps of the rod tip. The bait will hop off bottom and then plummet back down.

Snap jigging can also be done while trolling or drifting, with the line sloped back at about a 45-degree angle behind the boat. It's a good method for locating deep fall smallmouths up north, or in any situation when bass are scattered across a flat or drop-off.

The action is similar as before: Pitch the bait out and start the troll or drift, then snap or hop the bait up and forward a short distance before dropping the rod tip so the bait can fall straight back down on slack line. Use the boat to present the lure around the structure. ■

JIGGING WITH BAITCASTERS

Most anglers fish jigging baits with spinning tackle, but not Lawyer. He uses a 7-foot, 3-inch, medium-heavy, fast Lew's Magnum Hammer baitcasting rod and spools up 12- to 17-pound-test fluorocarbon line.

He will go with the heavier line when he's fishing in thick treetops and knows the bass might try to dart into the timber once hooked.

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LAKE TEXOMA

POTTSBORO, TEXAS

By David A. Brown

Winning Angler

Jeff Reynolds, Calera, Okla.

Winning Weight: 51-09 (15 fish)

Stat Line: This is Reynolds' third FLW win but his first at the Costa FLW Series level.



PHOTOS BY MATT PACE

Winning Baits

Reynolds started every morning by peppering his shallow smallmouth spots with a Heddon Super Spook in a custom-painted clear/blueback pattern. The pattern might not have been a perfect match to Texoma's threadfin shad, with their greenish backs, but Reynolds says he has developed confidence in that bait by successfully fishing it throughout the South.

He also used a green pumpkin Zoom Trick Worm Texas-rigged on a 3/0 hook with 1/2-ounce weight to fish for largemouths. He fished the rig slowly later in the day, especially when bright sunshine positioned fish on brush piles.

Target Areas

Reynolds weighed in a mixed bag of largemouths and smallmouths each day, and he had a strategy for each species.

"I had some places where I knew smallmouths lived, and every now and then a largemouth would show up," he says. "But I mostly targeted smallmouths early and largemouths later in the day."

When targeting largemouths, Reynolds fished brush piles in about 25 feet. He says the key spots for smallies were shallow sand or clay flats with about a foot of water over them. The broader the flat, the better, as such spots held the most bait and attracted more and bigger smallmouths.

Reynolds ran northeast of the takeoff area and mostly fished between Platter Flats and the Sunset Camp Public Use Area. Getting on his best bank early was essential for capitalizing on narrow windows of opportunity.

"The smallmouths tend to get up shallow during the night and just sit there," Reynolds says. "You usually have about 30 minutes to an hour, depending on whether it's cloudy or not, before they start backing out."

On the final day, Reynolds' first fish was a 3 1/2-pound smallmouth that nailed a topwater about 45 minutes into his day.

Presentation Keys

Surface busts and scattering baitfish frequently indicated smallmouth feeds, but Reynolds says he also monitored his forward-looking sonar to track bait schools and bass to anticipate shallow feeding.

Reynolds made extremely long casts with his topwater to avoid spooking bass in the skinny water. He used a 7-foot, 2-inch Cabela's XML rod that he helped design principally for swimbaits. The balance of substantial backbone and a softer tip gave him the leverage to launch his bait great distances.

Reynolds paired his rod with a Cabela's Arachnid reel (8.1:1) and 65-pound-test braid.

He also used his electronics to spy on offshore brush piles when largemouth fishing, which helped him maximize his time by picking out the spots with better fish and dialing in exactly where they were positioned.

For the Texas rig, Reynolds used a 7-2 Cabela's medium-heavy rod, the same reel and 20-pound-test fluorocarbon. He'd drag the rig around until he felt something solid and then slow down and work the structure.

Keys to Victory

Texoma is known for its temperamental nature, and the lake showed anglers a different mood each day. Reynolds says he did his best to maximize his potential when it was windy.

"I knew when the wind blew really hard the fish were going to bite," he says. "I knew some places that had some good ones, so I concentrated on those areas really hard during the windiest weather."

Reynolds knocked out 16 pounds, 12 ounces on a blustery day one, but he got that fairly early and decided to lay off some of his better spots and save the quality for the next two rounds. Day two brought calmer winds, but clouds blanketed the sky through noontime, and this likely influenced his best day of the event – a limit that went 19-4 and moved him up from 10th to first.

"On day three, it got dead calm, and I knew it was going to be tough. It was a struggle," says Reynolds, who closed the tournament with 15-9. "I probably only caught eight or nine keepers, but I was fortunate to get enough."

STIRRING THE POT

Staying near the bait meant he was probably near the fish, but tournament winner Jeff Reynolds says it wasn't enough simply to mark shad on electronics or visually observe them near the surface. He wanted to see frantic activity. He figured baitfish know that danger increases as predators approach, so they're not going to stay still while bass move in for the kill. So where there were frantic baitfish, there likely were hunting bass.

Moreover, there's something about a fleeing baitfish that brings out the beast in a bass, especially smallmouths. That's why Reynolds often took it upon himself to stimulate the show using a HydroWave and more manual methods.

"When you see those big bait balls just sitting there, the fish are not feeding on them," he says. "I'd actually pull up to those bait balls, turn around and hit my trolling motor and flush those bait balls. That would make those fish come up and start feeding, and you could catch one now and then." ■

CONDITIONS

Weather | mostly sunny on days one and three; partly cloudy on day two

Air Temperature | mid-90s on day one; upper 80s on day two; low 90s on day three

Water Temperature | 79 to 82 degrees

Water Clarity | approximately 1 foot of visibility

Wind | light day on one; SSE at 15 to 20 mph on day two; south at 7 to 10 mph on day three

Moon Phase | new

Predominant Lake Features | points, bluffs, riprap, docks, shallow wood and shoreline vegetation

Fishery Type | 89,000-acre reservoir on the Red River

PHOTOS BY DAVID A. BROWN



A finesse Texas rig fished in deep brush worked well for largemouths on Lake Texoma.

CO-ANGLER CHAMPION

Name: Dan Wilson

Hometown: Pilot Point, Texas

Winning Weight: 37-15 (15 fish)

Winning Program: Wilson caught his fish the first two days on a square-bill crankbait on wind-blown rocks. In the final round, he selected a shad-colored Strike King KVD Splash popper and fished it on 10-pound-test fluorocarbon that Wilson says helped tug his bait downward for the aggressive pops he desired.



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DETAILS

Sept. 28-30, 2017
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Casino Resort & Marina
Costa FLW Series Division: Western



CLEAR LAKE

LAKEPORT, CALIF.

By David A. Brown

PHOTOS BY KYLE WOOD



Winning Angler

Bryant Smith, Castro Valley, Calif.

Winning Weight: 53-15 (15 fish)

Stat Line: This is Smith's first pro win. Previously, fishing as a co-angler, he won the 2011 Costa FLW Series event at Lake Shasta.

CONDITIONS

- Weather** | mostly sunny on day one; partly cloudy on day two; sunny on day three
- Air Temperature** | low 90s on day one; upper 80s on day two; low 80s on day three
- Water Temperature** | 79 to 82 degrees
- Water Clarity** | 4 to 6 inches of visibility on the northern end; 8 to 15 inches of visibility on the southern end
- Wind** | light on day one; SSE at 15 to 20 mph on day two; south at 7 to 10 mph on day three
- Moon Phase** | first quarter
- Predominant Lake Features** | tules, docks, bluffs, points, shallow reefs and deep rock piles
- Fishery Type** | natural lake

Winning Baits

Despite the urge to use reaction baits – an instinct born out of extensive Clear Lake experience – Smith kept those crankbaits and bladed jigs in his rod locker. Instead, he committed to a Neko-rigged 5-inch green pumpkin/watermelon laminate Yamamoto Senko.

"I know where the fish usually hold this time of year in the fall transition, but I just couldn't get them to bite," he says. "I've gotten my butt kicked so many times by a guy with a Senko or a drop-shot, and I said, 'I'm not gonna do it this time. I'm going to at least try it [finesse tactics]. I made probably 50 casts with a crankbait. All the rest were with the Senko."

Smith rigged his bait with a 3/0 Decoy finesse hook and inserted a 3/32-ounce nail weight into the tail.

"It falls with kind of a circular motion, and I think that's why I got a lot more bites than other guys," says Smith of his rig. "A lot of guys were throwing a drop-shot, and I would come in behind them and catch fish."

The ruse was convincing enough for him to deliver the only 20-pound bags of the event – 20-15 on day one and 20-8 on day two. Adding 12-8 in the final round completed his wire-to-wire victory.

Target Areas

Docks in the Redbud arm and along the Lakeport area at the north end were Smith's main targets. He says these spots aligned with the annual transitions upon which he was depending.

"In a lot of the bays down south, the shad are going to be along the deeper structure on the outside in the summer-time, and when they start to move in, you can kind of follow the fish right on in," Smith says. "I fished a lot of the same areas I'd fish this time of year with reaction baits, but I just slowed down and caught them with a Senko."

"The fish were really scattered for me, and I didn't know when my next bite was going to happen. But I knew if I stayed in the bays, I'd eventually run into them. I was just trying to get bit, and I knew if I fished enough dock pilings I would."

Covering his bases, Smith fished a handful of deeper main-lake docks, but he couldn't catch any better quality. By day two, he'd decided to stick with the bays.



Presentation Keys

Smith fished a variety of dock designs, from simple T-shapes, to complex, multi-level structures with boat slips. Depth ranges varied, but Smith was able to dial in some limitations.

"I would never fish the end of a dock that was more than 12 feet deep on the end," he says. "That was mainly because I'm not patient enough to let my Senko fall that far, but also, I just found that I got more bites in shallower areas.

"I'd fish from 10 to 12 feet on the end and then hit every piling all the way up to 6 inches of water. I really couldn't pattern where they were going to be. I caught good fish off the ends, in the middle and up shallow."

Whenever space permitted, Smith got under or behind docks to maximize his presentations and time. Combing one side and then the other worked on lower structures, but if he could fit under a dock, it was game on.

"It was about casting angles," he says. "You can get different angles from underneath, and I needed to fish every piling. Some pilings weren't accessible from the outside, and being very thorough and efficient on every dock was very key for me."

Keys to Victory

Early in the tournament, Smith described his technique as "fishing slow, as fast as I can." Essentially, it was power finesse fishing. Smith was showing the fish a finesse look, but he was doing so in rapid fashion. No long soaks; rather, it was in-and-out-and-on-to-the-next-one fishing. Speed was the key, but with a caveat.

"You had to be really accurate with that Senko; you had to touch the piling," Smith says. "If you didn't touch the piling, you wouldn't get bit. I think a lot of the fish were suspended. Even if it was 6 feet deep, some of them would bite it 5 feet down.

"A lot of times when it's tough, I've literally seen them sit and stare at the piling. When they do that, your bait has to fall on their head, or else they don't care about anything that's behind them."

CO-ANGLER CHAMPION

Name: Jeff Hardin

Hometown: Chico, Calif.

Winning Weight: 40-06 (15 fish)

Winning Program: Hardin fished a 6-inch Roboworm (margarita mutilator) on a drop-shot with an 8- to 12-inch-long, 8- or 10-pound-test fluorocarbon leader most of the time, but he also caught one keeper on a 1/2-ounce football jig with a Strike King Rodent trailer.



COMBAT DOCK FISHING

The upside of fishing docks is that each usually provides multiple targets. The downside: It's never easy to fight fish out from under the structure. Smith was able to yank his smaller bass out with minimal struggle, but the quality fish that delivered the win required more effort and tackle selection strategy.

"Sometimes, it was luck; the way they'd swim," Smith says. "But I was using a heavier rod than I normally use for a nail-weighted worm. I was using a Dobyns 734 [7-3 heavy] with 15-pound-test fluorocarbon. The 15-pound test was really important. If I got one that wrapped me up, I knew it was not going to break me off very easily. I knew I at least had a shot at getting that fish in.

"I could control my fish better than with a spinning rod," he says about his decision to use a baitcaster. "It was all a numbers game, and I had to be as efficient as possible." ■



BFL WINNING TACTICS

Arkie – Lake Hamilton – Sept. 23-24

Boater: Spencer Shuffield, Hot Springs, Ark. – 20-08

Winding a buzzbait in less than 2 feet of water

Co-angler: Trevor Delaney, Benton, Ark. – 18-07

Bama – Pickwick Lake – Sept. 23-24

Boater: Tommy Hensley, Jackson, Ga. – 28-11

Fishing a 3/8-ounce Z-Man ChatterBait around isolated wood in the mid-lake area

Co-angler: Josh Hamilton, Mahen, Miss. – 20-15

Buckeye – Lake Erie – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Hunter Colwell, Zanesfield, Ohio – 35-10

Dragging a Strike King KVD Dream Shot (smoke) on a drop-shot rig on four rock piles in 8 to 14 feet of water near Middle Bass Island

Co-angler: Trevor Howard, Union, Ky. – 28-11

Bulldog – Lake Lanier – Sept. 9-10

Boater: Brad Wiley, Alto, Ga. – 28-02

Targeting schoolers on the south end of the lake near a hump, ridge, channel swing and standing timber with a Fish Head Spin (white) and Zoom Super Fluke (pearl white) or a Megabass Vision 110

Co-angler: Spencer Sato, Warner Robins, Ga. – 22-04

Choo Choo – Lake Guntersville – Sept. 30-Oct. 1

Boater: Alex Davis, Albertville, Ala. – 34-09

Frogging a 20-yard stretch of milfoil surrounded by hydrilla with a Jackall Kaera Frog (black), and flipping a Jackall Archelon (black and blue)

Co-angler: Chris Harcrow, Dawson, Ala. – 22-05

Cowboy – Toledo Bend – Sept. 30-Oct. 1

Boater: Glen Freeman, Zwolle, La. – 37-11

Dragging a Texas-rigged Double Z Lures Magnum T-Worm (red bug) and a Mister Twister worm on offshore ridges above Pendleton Bridge in 15 to 20 feet of water

Co-angler: Justin Shelton, Kemp, Texas – 27-07

Gator – Lake Okeechobee – Sept. 23-24

Boater: Jessie Mizell, Sarasota, Fla. – 42-12

Targeting schooling fish in the northeastern part of the lake using a 6th Sense crankbait

Co-angler: Mike LaPorta, Port Charlotte, Fla. – 38-04

Great Lakes – Miss. River (La Crosse) – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Tom Monsoor, La Crosse, Wis. – 36-10

Swimming a Humdinger Swim Jig with a 3 1/2-inch Yamamoto Swimming Senko trailer (white) through weeds that were 5 feet down and near the current, but not in it, and also targeting some spots in the 20-foot range on Saturday; swimming the same jig with a 3 3/4-inch Yamamoto Flappin' Hog (black and blue) with all but the tail trimmed off on Sunday

Co-angler: Richard Conrad, Burnsville, Minn. – 27-11

Hoosier – Ohio River – Sept. 9-10

Boater: Clyde McNaron, Trenton, Ohio – 18-00

Flipping the ends of laydowns near a creek channel with a Zoom Brush Hog and Mizmo tube, and casting topwater around laydowns and stumps on flats

Co-angler: Jim Krider, North Vernon, Ind. – 11-02

Illini – Rend Lake – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Greg Mullins, Mount Vernon, Ill. – 28-10

Targeting shallow riprap and wood on the north end of the lake with a 3/8-ounce Z-Man ChatterBait (chartreuse/white) with a Zoom Super Chunk trailer (green pumpkin) and a Zoom UV Speed Worm (green pumpkin)

Co-angler: Archie Eslinger, Paris, Ill. – 19-11

LBL – Kentucky/Barkley – Sept. 9-10

Boater: Cole Floyd, Leesburg, Ohio – 40-10

Walking an Evergreen SB-125 (bone) over 1- to 2-foot-deep bars and flats with wood cover near Paris, Tenn.

Co-angler: Ryan Dowell, Brandenburg, Ky. – 22-12

Michigan – Detroit River – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Joshua Barr, Stow, Ohio – 49-01

Dragging 3 1/2-inch tubes (green pumpkin) and soft jerkbaits (perch) on drop-shots on rock piles near islands

Co-angler: Gary Polenz, Milan, Mich. – 43-07

Mississippi – Ross Barnett Reservoir – Sept. 30-Oct. 1

Boater: Justin Atkins, Florence, Ala. – 24-06

Fishing offshore with a 10-inch Berkley PowerBait Power Worm (black) in 10 to 14 feet of water and in shallower brush piles

Co-angler: Hunter Utley, Cordova, Tenn. – 19-00

Mountain – Barren River – Sept. 23-24

Boater: Casey O'Donnell, Langston, Ala. – 23-15

Flipping a 1/2-ounce Gambler Jigzilla with a Strike King Rage Menace (green pumpkin) trailer around stumps and laydowns on the ends of channel-swing banks in 2 1/2 to 5 feet of water on the south end of the river, as well as throwing a SPRO Bronzeye Pop (albino)

Co-angler: Chad Hill, Marion, Ill. – 19-15

Music City – Old Hickory – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Rocco Simeri, Murfreesboro, Tenn. – 22-08

Fishing secondary points in the creeks using a Jewel Bait Co. Finesse Jig (Texas craw) with a Zoom Z Craw Jr. trailer (watermelon red)

Co-angler: Travis Puckett, Monroe, Tenn. – 10-04

North Carolina – Lake Norman – Sept. 9-10

Boater: Robert Walser, Lexington, N.C. – 25-06

Winding a buzzbait (white), fishing isolated wood with a Zoom Finesse Worm and flipping docks with a Zoom Brush Hog

Co-angler: Tobey Lawson, Raleigh, N.C. – 18-10

Northeast – 1000 Islands – Sept. 9-10

Boater: Travis Manson, Conshohocken, Pa. – 44-02

Drop-shotting a 4-inch Gajo Baits Spirit Shad (smoke purple and blue highlight) on a ledge in Lake Ontario in 18 to 40 feet of water and on isolated rock piles

Co-angler: Drew Tiano, Hudson, N.Y. – 40-13

Okie – Grand Lake – Sept. 9-10

Boater: Curt Warren, Rose, Okla. – 31-15

Junk-fishing on the north end of the lake around docks and wood in less than 10 feet of water on the bank using a 1/2-ounce Bass-X football-head jig

Co-angler: Alan Hill, Ada, Okla. – 22-09

Ozark – Lake of the Ozarks – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Marcus Sykora, Osage Beach, Mo. – 37-14

Fishing mid-lake brush piles in 14 feet of water using an unnamed crankbait and a Zoom Brush Hog

Co-angler: Aaron Strohkirch, Camdenton, Mo. – 28-01

Piedmont – Kerr Lake – Sept. 23-24

Boater: Jonathon Guins, Wendell, N.C. – 24-13

Fishing topwater and a Carolina-rigged Zoom Trick Worm in 3 to 6 feet on mid-lake points and pockets

Co-angler: Craig Wright, Rustburg, Va. – 18-10

Savannah River – Lake Hartwell – Sept. 16-17

Boater: Jayme Rampey, Liberty, S.C. – 26-06

Covering water and fishing fast along a 30-mile stretch, focusing on stumps, wood and docks with a Zoom Horny Toad (white) and a Buckeye Lures jig with a Zoom UV Speed Craw (green pumpkin) trailer

Co-angler: Beau Govreau, Cedar Hill, Mo. – 20-09

Shenandoah – James River – Sept. 30-Oct. 1

Boater: Keith Estes, Spring Grove, Va. – 28-00

Running the incoming tide, targeting wood in 3 to 5 feet of water with a Berkley PowerBait Power Worm (blue fleck) and crankbaits

Co-angler: Jonathan Sayers, Wytheville, Va. – 19-10

South Carolina – Lake Wylie – Sept. 30-Oct. 1

Boater: Willie McMullen, Oxford, Ga. – 26-03

Fishing a milk run of wood and docks in the South Fork Catawba River with a Z-Man ChatterBait (white), Picasso Dinn-R-Bell buzzbait (black) and Zoom Dead Ringer worm (junebug)

Co-angler: Mark Wingate, Gaston, S.C. – 16-04

Volunteer – Watts Bar Lake – Sept. 23-24

Boater: Brian Holcomb, Madisonville, Tenn. – 22-01

Winding a 3/8-ounce buzzbait or Gambler Cane Toad around isolated milfoil clumps in less than 2 feet of water with deeper water in front of the grass, focusing on mid-lake pockets near Euchee Marina Resort

Co-angler: Chris Viers, Haysi, Va. – 14-04

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YETI FLW COLLEGE FISHING WINNING TACTICS

By Chad Love

NORTHERN CONFERENCE LAKE ERIE – SEPT. 9 ADRIAN COLLEGE

High winds stacking up fish in a protected marina was the key to victory for the Adrian College duo of Chase Serafin of Highland, Mich., and Cody Batterson of Pleasant Hill, Iowa, who won the YETI FLW College Fishing Northern Conference tournament at Lake Erie presented by Bass Pro Shops on Sept. 9. Their five-bass limit weighed 17 pounds, 2 ounces.

A small craft advisory on Lake Erie the day of the tournament limited options for Serafin and Batterson, so they remained in Sandusky Bay and focused their efforts on a wind-protected marina. That pattern paid off, as the two quickly found fish.

“I think the key for us was just finding that marina,” says Serafin, a junior studying business marketing. “I think the fish were trying to leave and go to the main lake, but the wind just grouped them up back into the marina. It was an awesome day of fishing.”

Batterson, a sophomore biology major, caught the majority of his fish snapping a Mike’s Rx Baits tube (green pumpkin) through scattered eelgrass around the marina, while Serafin used a homemade jig tipped with a Buggy’s Baits USA Sick Craw trailer.

“You had to be snapping or cracking the jig and tube,” Serafin says. “You’d snap it two or three times, and they’d crush it on the fall.”

The pair also caught fish on a Rapala DT6 (old school) crankbait and a Rapala BX Brat (haymaker).



SOUTHERN CONFERENCE RED RIVER – SEPT. 23 LSU SHREVEPORT



The LSU Shreveport team of Harrison Hopkins of Bossier City, La., and Ryan Antee of Hosston, La., barely had to crank its motor to win the YETI FLW College Fishing Southern Conference tournament at the Red River presented by Bass Pro Shops Sept. 23.

Hopkins and Antee stuck within a few hundred yards of the launch site in Bossier City, La., to catch a five-bass limit weighing 11 pounds, 7 ounces.

During the first couple hours of the tournament the pair threw a black buzzbait in 3 to 4 feet of water in and around a stump field they had pre-fished in practice. Once the sun got up, they targeted laydowns and brush piles by flipping a Texas-rigged Zoom UV Speed Craw.

“Practice was really key for us in this tournament,” says Hopkins, a sophomore majoring in business. “We found our fish on Wednesday and left them alone until the morning of the tournament. Luckily, they were still there.”

“We got three good keepers off the morning buzzbait bite, including one that was our biggest of the tournament,” says Antee, a sophomore business major. “After the topwater bite slowed down we went to our midday pattern, where we ended up catching two more decent keepers to fill out our limit.”

WESTERN CONFERENCE CLEAR LAKE – SEPT. 30 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The University of Oregon's Ryan Habenicht and Daniel Marshall, both of Eugene, Ore., won the YETI FLW College Fishing Western Conference tournament at Clear Lake Sept. 30 with a five-bass limit weighing 18 pounds, 15 ounces.

"The key for us was figuring out that we needed to slow way down," says Habenicht, a senior business major. "Traditionally, we like to fish extremely fast. But the lake was fishing tough, and we had to make multiple casts sometimes. At one point, it took 11 casts to catch a fish off of a dock."

The pair began by swimming jigs along a stretch of shallow, rocky water on the south end of the lake, but after not getting a bite for the first three hours of the tournament, Habenicht and Marshall switched up and began catching fish on a variety of lures.

"We tried our backup docks in the Redbud arm, where we nailed them with a shaky head and a 1/10-ounce green pumpkin Ned rig," says Habenicht. "Every fish that we caught in the tournament came from a spot where we had not practiced, and on a different lure. We ended up catching about 15 to 20 fish between 11 and 1:30."

"We managed to catch more keepers throughout the day fishing docks and rock piles," says Marshall, also a senior business major. "The best lure for us was a Frenzy Baits Wack-A-Sack jig with a 3-inch shad-colored Reaction Innovations Smallie Beaver."



CENTRAL CONFERENCE MISSISSIPPI RIVER – OCT. 7 UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN



Swim jigs fished in 1 to 5 feet of water in backwater areas with current was the winning pattern for the University of Wisconsin team of Turner Truttschel of Madison, Wis., and Colin Steck of Waunakee, Wis., at the YETI FLW College Fishing Central Conference tournament on the Mississippi River in Prairie Du Chien, Wis., Oct. 7. They weighed in a five-bass limit worth 16 pounds, 10 ounces.

"We had five key areas in Pool 9 that each held at least one big fish," says Truttschel, a freshman in the pre-business program. The tournament launched in Pool 10. "The spots ranged from the bottom to the top of the pool, and they all had current and grass, rocks or weeds. We caught the majority of our fish swimming the jig across and around backwater points that had current and grass."

Although one keeper came on a topwater, most of the team's fish were caught on a 1/2-ounce Lethal Weapon II Swim Jig (black and blue), with a grub or minnow trailer.

"Our spots varied in depth and structure, but I think the biggest key was using our time wisely to be able to fish all of our spots effectively, especially making that long run that cut about an hour and a half out of our fishing time," adds Steck, a freshman pre-med major. ■

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MINNESOTA OPEN – MISSISSIPPI RIVER – JUNE 3
Jack Mulholland (left) and Jared Haugen – 17-00 (5 fish)
Plainview-Elgin-Millville High School



MICHIGAN OPEN – RAISIN RIVER – JUNE 10
Nicolas Biundo (left) and Joey Deichelbohrer – 15-02 (5 fish)
Wyandotte Roosevelt High School



LOUISIANA OPEN – OUACHITA RIVER – SEPT. 9
Tripp Bowman (left) and Matthew Nesbit – 13-07 (5 fish)
Haughton Fishing Team



MARYLAND OPEN – POTOMAC RIVER – SEPT. 16
Dominic Fiorille (left) and Ryan Appleby – 13-15 (5 fish)
Linganore High School



PENNSYLVANIA OPEN – RAYSTOWN LAKE – SEPT. 23
Gerald Brumbaugh (left) and Hunter Klotz – 15-06 (5 fish)
 Central Martinsburg High School



INDIANA OPEN – LAKE MONROE – SEPT. 30
Micah Hawkins (left) and Scott Sledge – 13-04 (5 fish)
 Greenwood Community High School



ILLINOIS OPEN – LAKE SPRINGFIELD – OCT. 7
Jackson Paden (left) and Joey Bissing – 12-10 (5 fish)
 Libertyville High School



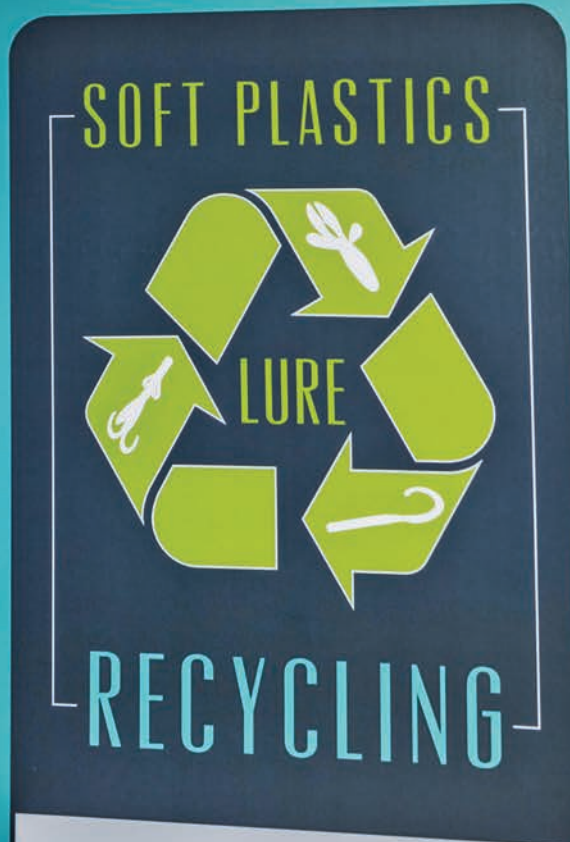
NEW YORK OPEN – ONEIDA LAKE – OCT. 14
Jacob Jones (left) and Austin Gaab – 18-09 (5 fish)
 Wildcats Fishing Team



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TBF



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

By Dan Johnson

▾ CABELA'S RENEWS SUPPORT FOR TBF, FEDERATION ANGLER

Cabela's has renewed its support for North America's largest network of grassroots tournament fishing organizations by extending its sponsorship of The Bass Federation (TBF) and Federation Angler for the 2018 tournament season.

"We are happy to continue our support of TBF and Federation Angler, and are looking forward to another great year in 2018," says Jennifer Murphy, Cabela's brand partnership program manager. "These organizations represent a dedicated group of knowledgeable and passionate anglers. That dedication shows in the quality events they plan and execute, and all the great work they do to promote fishing and conservation."

"We are extremely proud to continue our Cabela's partnership," adds Kelly Gohman, TBF-Federation Angler vice president of sales and marketing. "Cabela's has been a great supporter of our competitive fishing, youth outreach and conservation efforts. Plus, its industry-leading products are a perfect fit for our hard-fishing members and the thousands of fans following them across our media platforms."

Based in Ponca City, Okla., TBF operates under the Federation Angler umbrella and is a proud partner of FLW. Federation Angler represents the largest collection of fishing, youth and conservation organizations under one roof in North America today, including Student Angler Federation High School Fishing, The Walleye Federation, Cabela's Masters Walleye Circuit, Cabela's North American Bass Circuit and National Bass Anglers Association. For more information, visit federationangler.com, or call 580.765.9031. ■

The Cabela's logo is written in a large, yellow, cursive script font with a registered trademark symbol (®) at the end.

2017 TBF NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS UPDATE

So far this season The Bass Federation National Semi-Finals have produced exciting action and hefty payouts as the nation's top grassroots bass anglers battle for coveted invitations to the 2018 TBF National Championship.

Highlights from July through press time in mid-September include the following results:

District 21

New Mexico's Navajo Lake tested TBF competitors from Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming July 15-16 when the New Mexico Bass Federation hosted the District 21 Semi-Finals out of Navajo Dam.

After two days of intense competition, New Mexico's Robert Peixotto bested the boater field with 19.74 pounds. Peixotto received a \$1,500 paycheck and a ticket to the 2018 TBF National Championship.

The winning co-angler was Gregg Price, also from New Mexico. Price boxed limits both days for a total of 18.38 pounds.

David Withee was the top Colorado boater with 16.78 pounds. Along with the chance to represent the Centennial State at the TBF championship, Withee also earned \$500 for being the highest finishing Ranger Cup angler. Jason Gasper topped Colorado's co-anglers with 17.61 pounds to move on to nationals.

Wyoming's Tim Roberts and Camrone Marbles advanced as the Cowboy State's highest finishing boater and co-angler, respectively. Roberts weighed in 16.43 pounds, and Marbles brought in 15.63 pounds.

The New Mexico Bass Federation took home bragging rights and the first District 21 State Pride Award with 120.05 total pounds. The award goes to the state team of four pre-selected boaters and co-anglers with the largest cumulative catch.

A total of \$8,520 with 136 percent payback in cash and prizes was awarded.



Wade Headrick won the District 22 boater title.

District 22

The Utah Bass Federation hosted the District 22 National Semi-Finals tournament on Deer Creek Reservoir out of Heber City, Utah, Aug. 26-27.

Utah's Wade Headrick put together limits of 7.41 and 6.83 pounds for a 14.24-pound two-day total to win the boater title and collect \$1,170. Nevada's DeeJay Evans finished second with 11.73 pounds.

On the co-angler side, Utah's Gabe Aroca weighed in 8.14 pounds, worth \$585 and a trip to nationals. Paul Aznarez will join him after weighing 6.78 pounds to lead the Nevada co-anglers.

Total event payback was \$5,640 in cash and prizes, representing a nearly 157 percent payback on entry fees.

District 16

The Vermont Bass Federation hosted the 2017 TBF National Semi-Finals District 16 event on Lake Champlain Sept. 9-10 at South Hero, Vt.

Massachusetts angler Ed Gauthier topped the boater field with a 32.92-pound total. Gauthier received a \$1,700 paycheck and a slot in the 2018 championship.

The winning co-angler was EJ Nocon, also from Massachusetts. Nocon racked up a two-day total of 29.67 pounds for a total cash payout of \$850.

Scott Green was the top Vermont angler with 30.96 pounds. Joining him at the championship will be co-angler Scott McKay, who put together a two-day total of 24.93 pounds.

In the battle between the states, Vermont claimed the district's State Pride Award with 189.07 total pounds.

A total of \$9,800 with 128 percent payback was awarded in cash and prizes.



Rick Bosshard, District 9's top boater.

District 9

Wisconsin's lakes Winneconne and Winnebago hosted District 9 competitors from Wisconsin and Minnesota, who clashed Sept. 9-10.

On the boater side, Wisconsin's Rick Bosshard won with a 27.95-pound total for the event. He received a \$2,600 paycheck for first place, along with a slot in the TBF championship.

Scott Bonnema finished fourth overall with 27.16 pounds, but was the highest-placing Minnesota boater. He scored a \$610 paycheck and a trip to nationals.

Wisconsin's Mike Cottrell led the co-angler side with 18.35 pounds. For Minnesota, Dave Berg came from behind to take second overall with 15.38 pounds. Both advance to represent their respective states.

Further fueling the longstanding rivalry between Gophers and Badgers, the Wisconsin Bass Federation claimed the District 9 State Pride Award with 109.59 total pounds.



Michigan's Ross Parsons nabbed big bass honors at the District 11 event with this 6.48-pound Lake St. Clair bronzeback – his personal best.

District 11

TBF members from The Ohio Bass Federation helped Michigan stage the 2017 TBF National Semi-Finals District 11 event Sept. 9-10 out of scenic Elizabeth Park Marina on the lower Detroit River in Trenton, Mich.

Anglers spread out over a large area of Michigan waters during the two-day event, fishing Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River and Lake Erie.

Pat Upthagrove from Michigan bested the boater field with a two-day total of 42.99 pounds, which was good for a \$2,500 paycheck. Josh Kolodzaike, also from Michigan, topped the co-angler field with a total weight of 30.56 pounds, worth \$1,250.

Both Upthagrove and Kolodzaike now advance to the 2018 TBF National Championship, as do Ohio's top boater, Curtis Dowell, and co-angler, James Kain. Dowell sacked 36.53 pounds and finished fourth overall, while Kain weighed 29.04 to take second among co-anglers.

Besides fielding the top boater and co-angler, The Bass Federation of Michigan also claimed the District 11 State Pride Award with 249.1 total pounds.

A total of \$17,800 with 118.5 percent payback was awarded in cash and prizes.



District 11's top 10 boaters.

District 8

The Nebraska Bass Federation hosted the 2017 District 8 National Semi-Finals event Sept. 16-17 on Iowa's Lake Okoboji.

Nebraska's Jerry Pape finished the event with a 34.93-pound total to top the leaderboard, pocket \$2,280 and earn a trip to nationals.

South Dakota boater Justin Heidinger also advanced after taking second with 34.24 pounds. Paul Reinbold was North Dakota's highest-finishing boater with 31.52 pounds.

Nebraska's Jeremy Rasmussen claimed the co-angler title with a 23.85-pound total. Rasmussen earned \$1,140 and a spot in the nationals. Others advancing include South Dakota co-angler Ronald Dillon, who weighed 22.51 pounds, and North Dakotan Matthew Franz, who totaled up 18.94 pounds.

Nebraska took home the State Pride Award with 69.05 pounds.

District 6

TBF members from Arkansas and Oklahoma clashed on Lake Dardanelle Sept. 16-17 when the Arkansas Bass Federation hosted the District 6 National Semi-Finals qualifier out of Lake Dardanelle State Park.

Arkansas boater Mike Webster won with 27.09 pounds, worth \$2,070. Fellow Razorback Randy Allen topped the co-anglers with 19.92 pounds and cashed a \$1,035 check. Sooner standouts Gene Vogt, who weighed in 17.60 pounds to lead the state's boaters, and co-angler Donnie Combrink, who tallied 10.41 pounds, will represent Oklahoma in the championship. ■



Mike Webster topped the District 6 boaters.

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HSF STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS

Young anglers from across the country enjoyed the thrill of competitive bass fishing as the FLW/TBF Student Angler Federation High School Fishing program rolled through the summer with exciting state championship action.

Champions from events held May 27 through August include:

- May 27** - Oklahoma State Championship, Lake Eufaula, Alec Murphy and Jordan Gotcher
- June 3** - CT, MA and RI Tri-State Championship, Mashapaug Pond, Cameron Rhodes and Ben Wiitala
- June 3** - Indiana State Championship, Brookville Lake, Jaret Wampner and Austin Barr
- June 10** - Michigan Open and State Championship, Raisin River, Joey Deichelbohrer and Nicolas Biundo
- June 11** - Colorado State Championship, Lake Pueblo, Josey Morford and Alec Sloan
- July 9** - DE, MD, NJ and PA Quad-State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Jackson Staib and Jasper Brown
- July 15** - New York State Championship, Lake Champlain, Brady Guyette and Evan Howe
- July 15** - South Dakota State Championship, Lake Cochran, Zachary Brown and Riley Greenhoff



Top finishers from the Minnesota High School Fishing State Championship.

July 22 - Nebraska State Championship, Merritt Reservoir, Michael Muetting and Nick Spencer

August 20 - Minnesota State Championship, Mille Lacs Lake, Easton Fothergill and Alex Timm ■

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RON LAPPIN

Gilbertsville, Ky.

By Sean Ostruszka

How long have you been with FLW?

More than 20 years. I fished with (former tournament director) Dan Grimes a lot and worked for Mike James as a Ranger rep prior to joining FLW.

Many people don't know you were also a guide on Kentucky Lake, too.

Yeah, I started guiding ... let's see ... I got married in '74, so I started guiding in late 1974, and I did that until even a little after I started working here.

You know the Fishing Hot Spots maps? My name is actually on the bottom of the Kentucky Lake map. I took those guys out when they were mapping the lake and showed them spots and things they didn't know in the first 12 miles of the lake. That was probably back in the late '80s.

And you're quite the cook I hear.

I enjoy cooking almost as much as fishing. My dad, Richard, was in the catering business, and I was in the restaurant and catering business back when I was guiding. It's now Gatti's Pizza in Draffenville, Ky., but I used to own that restaurant when it was Gateway Steakhouse.

I still love cooking for big crowds. I have a giant grill on wheels that I trailer to church events or tournaments.

Is it true that you used to have long hair?

I did. I played music for years, and when I had hair I had real curly hair. I had it down to the middle of my back when it was wet. When it was dry I had really big hair. I had trouble fitting through a regular doorway.

I don't have any pictures, but my wife and daughter do. When Grimes hired me I used to take a red St. Louis plastic baseball batting helmet and cut a hole in the back and pull my hair through. I was a real hippy of old.

What kind of music did you play?

Rhythm and blues. Blue-eyed soul. Back then everything was R&B of some form or another, in the '60s and early '70s.

I sang in a choir in high school and junior high. In junior high we had more boys than girls, so I sang the girl's parts most of the time. I used to sing soprano, and then my voice changed.

How much work goes into being a tournament director?

The things that go into it that anglers don't see are plentiful. You have to secure a date and a site. We have a giant board (to plan tournament schedules), and it usually goes through seven

or eight versions and takes two months to nail down. Then you have to apply for all the permits and work with the sponsors. And the most important thing is that a tournament director holds the lives of every angler in his hands with his decisions.

I've always said if any angler had to set up just one tournament, they'd never complain again.

You've seen a lot in 20 years with FLW. Have any favorite memories?

Several. There are so many opportunities now with the high school and college programs to meet some fine young people. The future of everything – a church, business, anything – is based on young people. In my opinion it's the biggest step for the future of the sport. Anyone who has a job in this industry in 10 years will be because of that.

What's your lasting memory of FLW after all these years?

People can believe what they want, but this company has changed the sport for the better as much as anyone. So many people owe their careers to what FLW has done. And beyond that, it's encouraged every one of us to be the best we can be. I've been blessed to work here. ■



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