FISHING LEAGUE WORLDWIDE

OCT/NOV 2016

2016 FORREST WOOD CUP | SPECIAL ISSUE

Bass Fishing™

THE TIN MAN

UP A NARROW CREEK, IN AN ALUMINUM BOAT, JOHN COX MADE HISTORY AT WHEELER LAKE

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DISAVOWING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, JOHN COX WON THE 2016 FORREST WOOD CUP IN A SIMPLE ALUMINUM BOAT, PROVING THAT BIGGER AND FASTER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER.

by Rob Newell

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

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PRESENTED BY Walmart

HOSTED BY HUNTSVILLE Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau

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PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

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John Cox

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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE FORGOTTEN RUNNERS-UP

Quick question: Who finished second at the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup? If you followed the Cup tournament coverage at FLWFishing.com back in early August, or if you already flipped through the pages of this issue of *FLW Bass Fishing* magazine, then you ought to know that the answer is Michael Neal. The east Tennessee pro finished 4 pounds, 3 ounces behind champion John Cox.

Here's another one: Who finished second at the 2015 Forrest Wood Cup?

How about in the 2010 Forrest Wood Cup? And at the first Cup in 1996?

Any guesses? Probably you'd have to scan the annals of FLWFishing.com's tournament database to find the answers because nobody remembers second place except the guy who finished in second place.

It's just the way it is in championship bass fishing. To the winner goes the glory – and the big check, the sponsorships, the lifetime title of Cup champion, the spot in the history books, and so on.

Finishing runner-up is still a great accomplishment, and with regard to the Cup, there's a lot of history in second place. Or rather, there's a lot of "almost history" in second place.

Tournament veteran Tommy Biffle has the most impressive runner-up stats in Cup history. Over a four-year span from 1997 to 2000, Biffle finished second at the Cup three times – a record. He's also finished second at the Bassmaster Classic twice. That's five runner-up finishes in 26 combined championship appearances. I'd call him a bridesmaid, but the bristly Oklahoman is not the kind of guy you dare call a bridesmaid.

Quaker State pro Scott Canterbury has suffered a similar plight recently. The Alabaman finished second in the 2012 Cup and did it again in 2014, the latter by a scant 1 ounce behind Anthony Gagliardi at Lake Murray. Canterbury lost what would've been the winning fish on the last day at Murray. It was heartbreaking not just for him, but also for the thousands of fans who watched the video clip of Canterbury's subsequent come apart.

Elsewhere on the list of runners-up is Mike Iaconelli, a Classic winner who nearly became the sixth pro to win both major championships in 2009, and two former Cup champs who each narrowly missed becoming the first two-time winner: Darrel Robertson in 2007 and Jacob Wheeler in 2013. Wheeler, who won the Cup in 2012, was beaten in 2013 by Randall Tharp, who took second in 2011 to Scott Martin, who took second in 2004 – proof that second chances do come around in our sport.

There are other pros on the list of Cup runners-up that have slipped from the tournament scene entirely or are still fishing but, in several cases, never really achieved the level of fame that would've come their way had they finished one place higher. I wonder how often those pros that came so close to making history look back and wonder what might have been. A fish here, an ounce there. One bad decision. What small thing was it that separated them from that big silver Cup?

For Neal, such questions are fresh in his mind. While Cox basks in Cup glory, Neal will either spend the coming weeks and months pondering the could've and should've, or he'll shift his focus to the approaching 2017 season and its new opportunities. After all, how great pros react to such setbacks, and perform in the future, ultimately determines how they will be remembered.

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FISHING EXPOSED

MIXED GREENS

Jacob Wheeler's Forrest Wood Cup game plan was all about access. He spent the entirety of the tournament far in the back of Wheeler Lake's creeks in areas that were so difficult to reach that the fish living there were often less pressured than fish in other parts of the lake. Getting there was often risky business for Wheeler, who ran his boat full bore across shallow flats, relying on scouting in practice and careful motor setup and boat control to get there safely. Other times, such as in the scene shown here, Wheeler had to idle through heavy cover. Those lily pads were no match for his Evinrude E-TEC G2, which apparently doubles as a salad shooter in a pinch.

Photo by Patterson Leeth

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FISHING EXPOSED

THE SHIN SHOW

If you follow FLW, then you're probably aware of FLW's live on-the-water Twitter feed, which is available to Twitter users and at FLWFishing.com all four days of Walmart FLW Tour events. In the case of the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup Twitter feed, a significant portion of the day-one coverage was directed toward Japanese pro Shinichi Fukae, who put on a midmorning clinic that included this clutch kicker. Fukae finished the day in seventh place with 13 pounds, 7 ounces. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to repeat his success on day two, and Fukae fell out of cut range with only three fish for 4-1. He finished 32nd.

Photo by Kyle Wood

COMING UP IN FLW COMPETITION

WALMART FLW TOUR INVITATIONAL
Oct. 20-22
Norris Lake

COSTA FLW SERIES
Oct. 6-8
Central – Lake of the Ozarks
Nov. 3-5
Championship – Table Rock Lake

FLW BASS FISHING LEAGUE
Oct. 1-2
Mississippi – Pickwick Lake
North Carolina – High Rock Lake

BFL REGIONALS
Oct. 6-8
Northeast, Savannah River, Shenandoah & Volunteer
Kerr Lake

Oct. 13-15
Buckeye, Great Lakes, Illini, Michigan
Kentucky Lake

Bulldog, Choo Choo, Gator, South Carolina
Lake Seminole

Oct. 27-29
Bama, Music City, North Carolina, Piedmont
Lake Hartwell

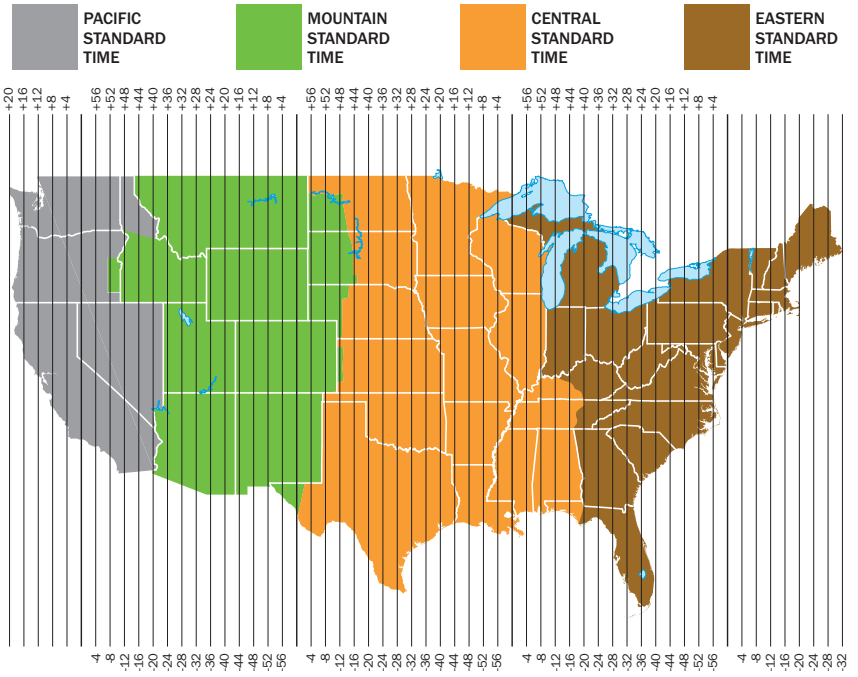
Cowboy, Mississippi, Okie, Ozark
Lake Dardanelle

Nov. 11-12
BFL Wild Card

FLW COLLEGE FISHING
Oct. 8
Southern – Ouachita River

FISHING LEAGUE WORLDWIDE

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2016 SOLUNAR TABLES



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

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

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

The major periods last for approximately 2 to 3 1/2 hours, and the minor periods last for approximately 3/4 to 1 1/2 hours. To determine the start of major and minor times for your area, find the bold time-zone rule on the map. If you are located in the area left of the time-zone rule, add the number (in minutes) at the top 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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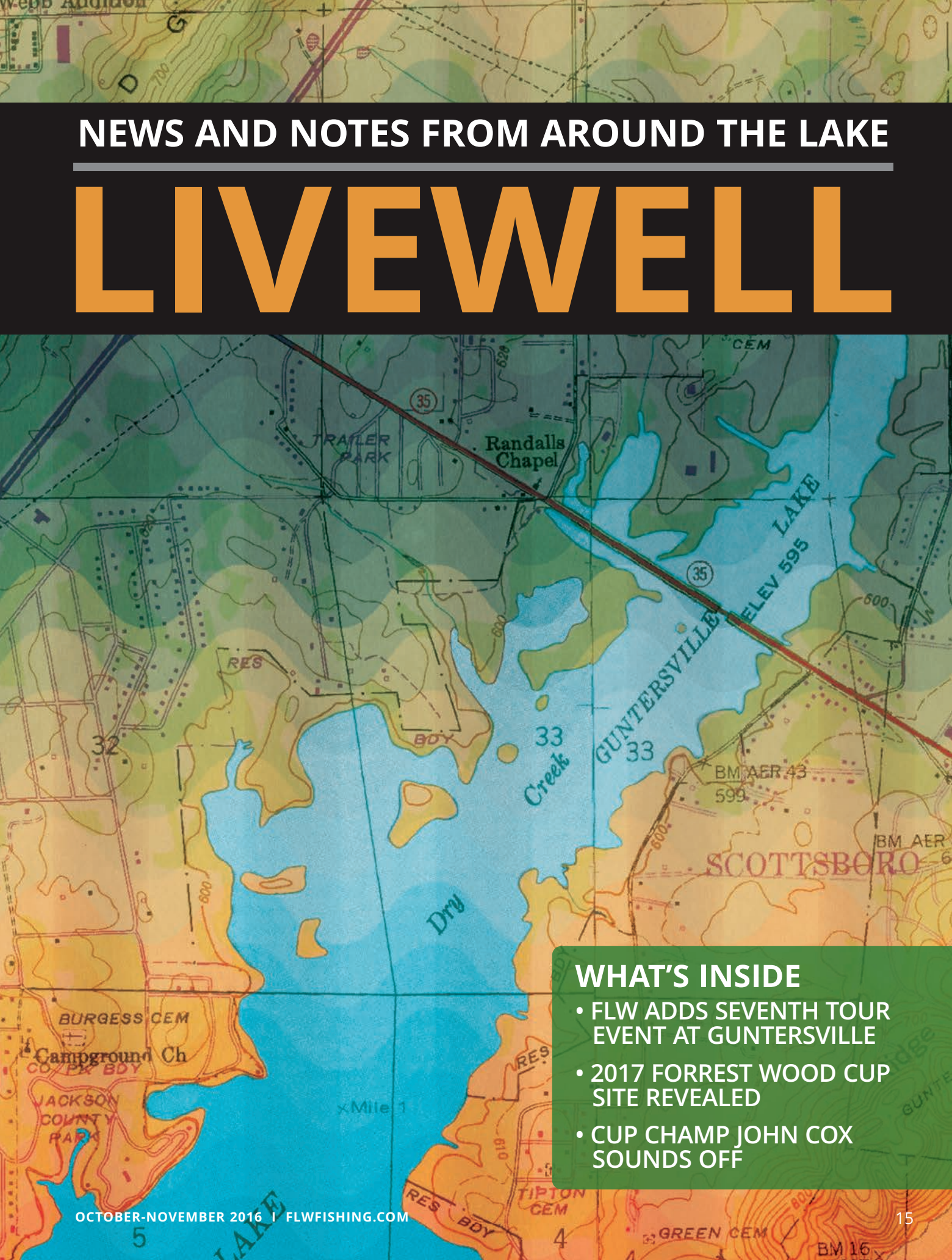
2016 FORREST WOOD CUP CHAMPION

> The "Tin Man" John Cox shunned the modern bass boat trend that says bigger and faster is better and rode his simple aluminum rig into fishing history at the Forrest Wood Cup on Wheeler Lake.

JOHN COX

NEWS AND NOTES FROM AROUND THE LAKE

LIVEWELL



WHAT'S INSIDE

- FLW ADDS SEVENTH TOUR EVENT AT GUNTERSVILLE
- 2017 FORREST WOOD CUP SITE REVEALED
- CUP CHAMP JOHN COX SOUNDS OFF

LIVEWELL

2017 WALMART FLW TOUR SCHEDULE

FLW announced its original six-tournament 2017 Walmart FLW Tour schedule at a press conference in the company's trade show booth at ICAST 2016 in Orlando back in July. In August, at the Forrest Wood Cup pre-tournament banquet in Huntsville, FLW sweetened the deal by adding a seventh tournament — the new opener — at Lake Guntersville. The date and location of the 2017 Cup were announced on stage at the 2016 Cup's day three weigh-in.

THE FULL SCHEDULE:

1. LAKE GUNTERSVILLE
Guntersville, Ala. – Feb. 2-5
Hosted by Marshall County Convention & Visitors Bureau

2. LAKE TRAVIS
Jonestown, Texas – Feb. 16-19
Hosted by the City of Jonestown and Austin Sports Commission

3. HARRIS CHAIN
Leesburg, Fla. – March 9-12
Hosted by Lake County, Fla.

4. LAKE CUMBERLAND
Burnside, Ky. – April 6-9
Hosted by the Somerset Tourist and Convention Commission

5. BEAVER LAKE
Rogers, Ark. – April 27-30
Hosted by Visit Rogers

6. MISSISSIPPI RIVER
La Crosse, Wis. – May 18-21
Hosted by Explore La Crosse

7. POTOMAC RIVER
Marbury, Md. – June 15-18
Hosted by the Charles County Board of Commissioners

FORREST WOOD CUP
LAKE MURRAY
Columbia, S.C. – Aug. 11-13
Hosted by Capital City Lake Murray Country Regional Tourism Board

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MATCHUPS

Shane LEHEW

Mooresville, N.C.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST FISH?

SL: Probably a bass that I caught with my dad, Troy, and grandpa, Larry LeHew.

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FISHED YOUR FIRST TOURNAMENT?

SL: I was about 12 and started fishing with the FLW/TBF Junior Angler Program.

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, HOW WOULD YOU RATE LEDGE FISHING?

SL: I usually start out with confidence and it slowly dwindles. I will say about a 6.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE FISHERY?

SL: Lake Guntersville. I've been there a few times with college fishing, and we won there and got second another time.

BESIDES BASS, WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SPECIES TO CATCH?

SL: I like catching stripers, but I haven't fished for anything but bass for at least five years.

ARE YOU A HUNTER?

SL: I have in the past but don't have time for it now. We stay busy fishing tournaments all fall and winter here around Lake Norman, and I'd much rather be fishing.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOU WERE FORCED TO MOVE TO NEW YORK CITY?

SL: I would be scared. I'm definitely not a big city guy.

IF YOU WEREN'T A PRO FISHERMAN, WHERE WOULD YOU WORK?

SL: I went to college for criminal justice, so maybe a detective.

WHO WOULD YOU RATHER TAKE FISHING: KANYE WEST OR KIM KARDASHIAN?

SL: I would have to say Kim. I don't like Kanye and his attitude.

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING TOP FLW ANGLERS

by Tyler Brinks
PHOTOS BY D.W. REED II

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST FISH?
JC: A bluegill, fishing with my dad, Reddy.

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FISHED YOUR FIRST TOURNAMENT?
JC: It was a bank-fishing derby, and I won it. It was by total length. Everyone else was fishing for bluegills, and I caught a shiner that was longer.

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, HOW WOULD YOU RATE LEDGE FISHING?
JC: I love doing it, just not in tournaments. I would say a 5.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE FISHERY?
JC: Lake Champlain, because you can catch largemouths or smallmouths and fish from 4 inches to 40 feet deep and still catch them.

BESIDES BASS, WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SPECIES TO CATCH?
JC: Anything in saltwater. They fight so much harder, and you never know what you'll catch.

ARE YOU A HUNTER?
JC: I went one time, and we got a 12-foot gator on the St. Johns River. *Swamp People* makes it look easy, but it's hard work. It was unbelievable how hard it was.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOU WERE FORCED TO MOVE TO NEW YORK CITY?
JC: I've never been there, but went to Chicago and hated it. I was out of my element.

IF YOU WEREN'T A PRO FISHERMAN, WHERE WOULD YOU WORK?
JC: I would probably be working at Walmart or someplace like that.

WHO WOULD YOU RATHER TAKE FISHING: KANYE WEST OR KIM KARDASHIAN?
JC: Jeez, that's a hard one. I'd probably be sick that day so I didn't have to go. ■

John **COX**
DeBary, Fla.

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FLW RECOGNIZED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE OUTDOORS

In late August, FLW was named the 2016 American Outdoor Organization of the Year by the "Legends of the Outdoors" National Hall of Fame in recognition of the company's contributions to the outdoors heritage. FLW President of Operations Kathy Fennel, center, and Vice President of Operations Dave Washburn, right, accepted the award from Hall of Fame Founder Garry Mason. The presentation was made during the group's annual banquet in Nashville on the General Jackson Showboat. ■

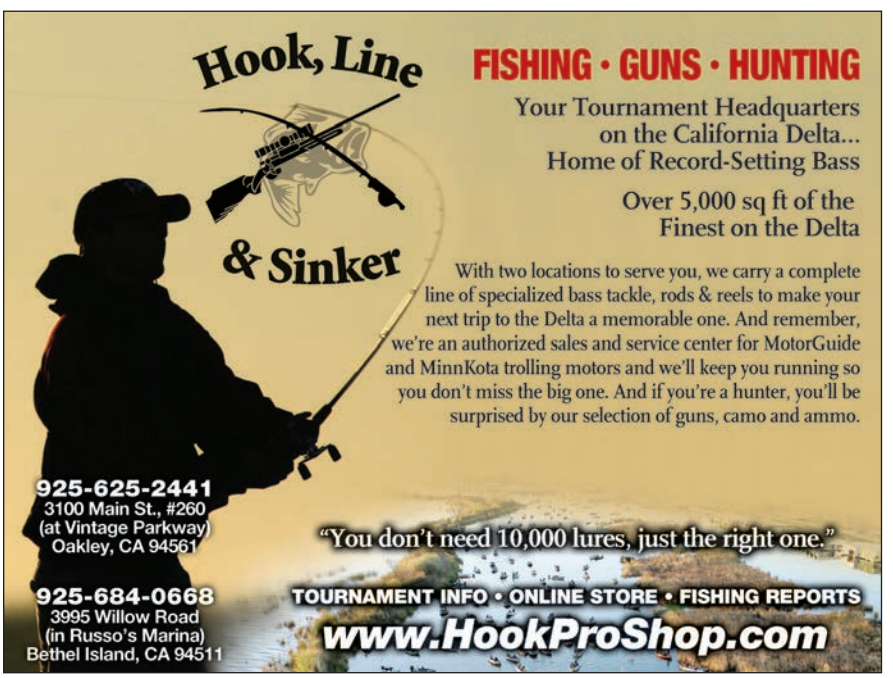
CALIFORNIA ANGLERS DODGE A BULLET

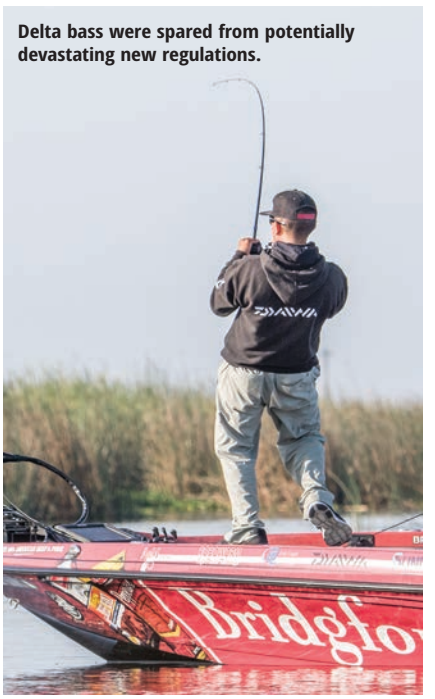
With the help from a few friends in high places, California bass fishermen were able to turn back a proposal that would have opened the door to eradication of black bass in the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary. A petition offered to the California Fish and Wildlife Commission by a consortium of special-interest groups would have changed recreational size and bag limits for bass and other "nonnative species," with their removal being the ultimate goal. The petition was pulled from consideration prior to a Commission meeting in late August, presumably because the petitioners were assured that their effort wouldn't pass.

Opponents charge that the eradication of nonnative species wasn't the primary motive of the group calling for the harvest changes. Get rid of the bass in the California Delta, and eventually get rid of one major stakeholder – the fishing community – that stands in the way of unfettered access to the Central Valley's most precious commodity: water.

Besides local opposition focused against the petition by Allied Fishing Groups, the proposal was assailed by heavy hitters in the world of bass fishing including FLW, American Sportfishing Association (ASA), B.A.S.S., California Sportfishing League, Coastal Conservation Association California, Coastside Fishing Club, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, National Marine Manufacturers Association and Water4Fish.

The petitioners include Coalition for Sustainable Delta, California Chamber of Commerce, California Farm Bureau Federation, Kern County Water Agency, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Northern California Water Association, San Joaquin Tributaries Authority, The Southern California Water Committee, State Water Contractors and Western Growers Association. ■





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READER REPLY

TJ Maglio's article on dealing with backlashes (*Fishing 101: Tips for Dealing with Backlashes*, July 2016 issue, pg. 36) was helpful and appreciated. Please forward this email to him to add to his arsenal of hints to deal with backlashes.

The best way to deal with backlashes is not to get one. There is one simple trick to preventing most backlashes, and if one still happens it will be a "shallow one" as opposed to the deep nightmarish one.

It's common knowledge that all backlashes occur because the spindle or spool is turning faster than the line can escape through the line guide, and the line loosens progressively from the inside to the surface and (results in a) bird's nest.

SOLUTION: Peel off enough line equal to a "lengthy cast," plus a little more. Then put a piece of translucent Scotch tape across the spool. Then reel the line back on and go fishing. Make sure you use the semitransparent/milky colored type of tape that can be written on, as the clear version is a different composition and could melt in intense summer heat.

This technique prevents the line from loosening first deep within the spool. Even if you still sometimes get a backlash, it will be one of the shallow variety, which is much easier to untangle.

Finally, the tape will not be an issue in the event you hook a fish big enough to take enough line to get past the location of the tape. The tape described is soft enough so as not to cause a problem coming or going through the reel line guide (the level-wind). I suppose it's possible for the tape to cause an issue should it get lodged in the reel worm gear, but in 30 years I have never had a problem.

This technique REALLY WORKS.

Good Fishing,
Larry Moody

SOUTH AFRICAN ANGLERS JOIN FLW FAMILY

Fishing League Worldwide, the moniker behind the familiar FLW logos, really is worldwide. Last year the tournament organization's Costa FLW Series International Division got off the ground with four countries – China, South Korea, Canada and Mexico – and has since grown to include South Africa. The announcement regarding the latter's entry into the FLW family came in mid-August after President of Operations Kathy Fennel and Hannes Lindeque of WJ Lindeque CC signed off on the agreement. WJ Lindeque CC will promote, organize and operate the South African tournament series.

Since bass were first stocked in South Africa's lakes several decades ago, bass fishing has become a popular sport in that country. Where there is sport, there is competition, and South African bass anglers will have plenty of opportunities to showcase their skills through the International Division. Beginning in 2017, FLW South Africa will conduct a short series of qualifying tournaments whose top fishermen will advance to the Costa FLW Series Championship. The top two pros and co-anglers from each country in the International Division will compete in the championship, and the International Division pro who finishes highest will advance to the 2018 Forrest Wood Cup.

"We are thrilled to add South Africa to our growing list of countries offering FLW events," says Fennel. "The global bass fishing community has embraced FLW as a unifying force as we strive to provide unsurpassed opportunities for anglers, fans and sponsors worldwide. South Africa has incredibly dedicated anglers that we are pleased to welcome into the FLW family."

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ASK THE EXPERTS

ELECTRONIC FISHING

Q. When do you use a HydroWave, and what settings do you use?

A. **Jim Tutt, Longview, Texas –**
I have been using a HydroWave since 2009, and it's a piece of equipment I've gained a lot of confidence in. Generally, I use it when targeting schools of fish, and on ledges and other offshore spots. It often makes a difference. Sometimes it might be just one fish, which can be huge when competing on Tour.

Just this past June at the Walmart FLW Tour event on Kentucky Lake, it made a difference for me. After going fishless for the first half-hour or so, I decided to turn on my HydroWave unit. Within three minutes, my partner and I started catching them, and the action was steady for the next six hours.

If I were to pick a favorite setting combination, it would be "Feeding Frenzy" with a 30-second delay, meaning the unit switches on and off automatically, with a 30-second delay in between. That's what I used on Kentucky Lake.

THE RIGHT LINE

Q. **How important is line color?**

A. **Clark Wendlandt, Leander, Texas –**
To me, it's all about confidence. Lines that are more visible can help you to see what your line – and bait – is doing. If line visibility helps you to detect more bites, then I believe you should go that route. If you feel it's all about keeping the bait stealthy, then go with a natural or clear color. I ask myself if I think a particular line color is going to affect the number of bites that I am going to get, and I make the call based on the answer.

For monofilament lines, I generally use a green line. When using braids, I go with green and darker shades – colors that blend in.

SHORT-STRIKES

Q. **When do you use trailer hooks on spinnerbaits and buzzbaits?**

A. **Darrel Robertson, Jay, Okla. –**
Trailer hooks are very important on spinnerbaits, especially in real clear water or if I am working it fast. I use trailer hooks on my buzzbaits as well. If I am fishing muddy water or working a spinnerbait around heavy cover, I've found that I don't need a trailer hook since retrieves are slower and trailer hooks have a tendency to get hung up.

I generally use a 2/0 trailer hook, sometimes even a little 1/0. As far as rigging, I like to thread clear plastic tube over the hook eye before sliding on the trailer hook to prevent the trailer hook from flopping around in back.

BUZZBAITING TOADS

Q. **How do you like to rig a soft-plastic toad on a buzzbait?**

A. **Todd Auten, Lake Wylie, S.C. –**
I start by first removing the buzzbait's skirt and threading a Zoom Horny Toad on the hook. After I have nearly the entire toad threaded on, I poke the hook out just short of where the legs come together. This prevents the toad from rolling on the hook shank and keeps the bait well-balanced. Next, I carefully slide the top of the toad over the head of the buzzbait and secure it with a drop or two of glue. The homemade buzzbait I use has protruding eyes, which I like to grind off to help the toad slide over the top of the head more easily. I know some people like to keep the skirt on and rig it differently, but I've found that my setup skips real well under docks and other stuff. ■

Ask the Experts *is compiled by Paul Strege. If you have a question that you'd like answered, email it to questions@flwfishing.com.*

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ASK A BIOLOGIST

PROTEIN-PACKED BASS

by Dr. Steven Cooke

Q. Do California bass get so big because they eat trout, which offer more protein than other baitfishes?

A. That's a great question, and at a high level it's true. The same rule applies to bass as it does for all animals: You are what you eat.

That said, there are many factors that affect bass growth, chief among them being metabolism. At higher water temperatures bass crank through calories more quickly to support their metabolism, and a bass that is swimming around uses up more calories than one that is stationary under a log. This means that how much effort (and energy) a bass spends finding, eating and digesting a prey item is a primary driver of its maximum growth potential.

Chasing down and digesting a spiny-finned prey item such as a sunfish or perch is more costly than digesting something such as a golden shiner. So by and large softer prey fish such as trout, shad and shiners are more energetically rewarding than bluegills and the like.

To the bigger question though, caloric density of a prey item is indeed an important factor, and while protein is important to fish growth, it's really the fat content of prey items that tends to drive up calories and growth. Rainbow trout have about 20 percent more calories per unit mass than yellow perch or even fathead minnows, so it is accurate to say that a bass feeding on the same quantity of rainbow trout would get more calories (and thus grow bigger) than a bass feeding on bluegills under the same conditions.

Although prey quality and abundance certainly do affect maximum growth, any discussion on the subject must also include genetics and climate. We know that growth potential is dictated to some degree by annual climate. Bass that live in the North and spend part of their year under ice – where they eat little and live off of stored energy reserves during winter – tend not to have the same annual growth potential as fish that can eat year round. That's why you find bigger bass in Texas and Florida than in the North.

So, those smallish reservoirs in California do tend to produce massive bass largely because of the availability of high-quality, calorie-rich prey (rainbow trout), whereas many of the lakes and ponds in Florida produce big fish not because the prey quality is particularly calorie-rich, but more so because of the climatic and genetic factors. ■

Meet Our Expert

Dr. Steven Cooke is an associate professor and Canada research chair of environmental science and biology at Carleton University.

Fishing Tip: When targeting giant bass, choose baits that mimic prey fish with the highest energy-to-availability ratio. For some places this might be trout, but in others it might be big gizzard shad or golden shiners. Paddle-tail swimbaits, glide baits and big topwaters are ideal choices.

TJ Maglio produces the Ask a Biologist *department. If you have a question you'd like to have answered by a fisheries expert, please email it to TJ at info@flwfishing.com.*

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ANGLER PROFILE

GOING ON THE RECORD WITH NOTABLE FLW FISHERMEN

ROY HAWK

COSTA FLW SERIES STAR CONTEMPLATES ANOTHER RUN AT THE WALMART FLW TOUR

by Colin Moore

PHOTOS BY DANIEL PARK, PIXEOPRO LLC

It's been said that everyone is really good at something, yet the circumstances of their lives might never reveal what that something is. Roy Hawk counts himself among the fortunate ones who discovered their true talent, even when the chance of doing so seemed unlikely. Despite there being nothing in his youth to suggest that he had the chops to become a great fisherman, he became one.

Call it kismet or a fortuitous meeting of opportunity with instinctive skill. Whatever the reason, it happened, though Hawk deserves some credit for putting himself in a position to discover that he had a knack for finding bass and making them bite.

Now the Arizona angler is considering whether it's time to take the next step forward in a journey that began on Illinois farm ponds when he was a boy. As the 2016 Costa FLW Series Western Division Strike King Angler of the Year, Hawk is preparing to vie for the Costa FLW Series Championship on Table Rock Lake Nov. 3-5. Between then and registration time for the 2017 Walmart FLW Tour, Hawk and his family will decide if he's ready to compete as a pro on the Tour.

It wouldn't be the first time. Hawk fished the Tour in 2010 and 2011 and cashed a few checks, but the sponsor support he needed to handle all the logistics and expenses associated with living in the West and fishing in the East wasn't there. After a couple of seasons in which he scrambled to make the Tour work for him, Hawk decided to stay in the Costa FLW Series.

Steady Progress

Crowding a half-million dollars in FLW tournament earnings and with a solid resume that includes seven FLW Series Championship qualifications since 2004, Hawk is in a better position to pursue his dream of competing at the top level. In the meantime, he'll continue to participate in the Costa FLW Series Western Division, where he's been a dominant force with 11 top 10s and two wins since 2003.

Besides claiming the Angler of the Year title in 2016, Hawk finished 14th in the standings the previous year and was runner-up in 2014. Along the way, Hawk also won the prestigious WON BASS U.S. OPEN on Lake Mead in 2015. Yet Hawk would be the first to admit that the upward trajectory of his career as a pro isn't easy to analyze.

"Sometimes I scratch my head and wonder," he says of his success. "I've said it on the weigh-in stage before: How I finish a tournament is none of my business; how I fish it is. I can't control all the variables. All I can do is focus on the next cast and be the best fisherman I can be.

"I want to win every tournament I get in, but mainly I worry about the next cast and being consistent in how I fish. I focus on the moment and don't think about what if this or that happens in a tournament. Honestly, I've won tournaments where I didn't know how I won them: The other guy broke down, he ran out of fish. There are times when I don't do so well, but then the other guy does even worse, and it works out for me."

True, luck has a role in any sport, but Hawk has made the most of his. Considering his background, who would have guessed it? Born in Carbondale, Ill., the 45-year-old pro spent much of his youth in south-central Illinois, where lakes such as Crab Orchard hosted the occasional jackpot tournament sponsored by local civic groups. When he was still in grade school, Hawk entered his first event, a Moose Lodge fundraiser whose main purpose was to collect fish of any kind for a benefit fish fry. Competing from of a canoe, Hawk caught a bass big enough to earn him two silver dollars – keepsakes he still has that remind him of how far he's progressed.

"When I was about 16 and had moved to Salt Lake City, I went back to Illinois visiting relatives and wound up fishing

a team tournament on Crab Orchard," recalls Hawk. "My dad and I were supposed to fish it out of a canoe with an electric trolling motor, but the weather turned crappy, and it was really rough. My dad backed out, so I fished with a family friend who had a bass boat. We finished third in the tournament, and I caught the biggest bass. I thought to myself, 'I like this tournament fishing, and I'm going to do a lot more of it.'"

Discovering that he had a natural affinity for bass fishing and encouraged by tournament results, Hawk went back to Utah, joined the Northern Utah Bass Anglers and fished as many events as he could – out of the back of somebody else's boat.

"Utah is where I really cranked it up," says Hawk. "As I progressed and got better – fishing club tournaments and small, local small-pot derbies – I set my sights on some of the bigger tournaments in the West. I didn't have a boat, but I had friends who did, and usually they would let me sort of run the boat as far as where and how we fished."

Win Some, Lose Some

Hawk's first big break came in a U.S. OPEN bass tournament where he won a big bass award that carried with it a certificate for a Ranger boat. Hawk used the certificate as a down payment on a big-water Ranger – his first – in 2003.

From there on his tournament career took a mostly upward path. Along the way, Hawk and his family – wife Kristina, sons Skyler, Sonny and Austin, and daughter Kaitlyn – made their home in Lake Havasu City, and Lake Havasu became a training ground of sorts where Hawk refined his technique and, in essence, learned what his fishing strengths are and how best to utilize them.

Roy qualified for the Forrest Wood Cup in 2015 and finished 37th. More important to him, Sonny won the co-angler championship in the same event. That was a high point, but not surprisingly, there are also some lows in the record. Roy finished 101st in the 2015 Costa FLW Series Championship last fall on the Ohio River with a two-day sack of three bass that weighed 6 pounds, 3 ounces. Though meager by his standards, the catch illustrated Roy's go-for-broke approach to competitive fishing.

"I'm definitely a quality guy. It's there or it's not, and sometimes I bomb," he confesses. "That's one of the reasons I've never won Angler of the Year before [2016]. Heck, in 2009 I won two events out of four and didn't get Angler of the Year.

"I make all my money from how I fish. So I have to win, and the way to win is to catch the five biggest fish a day for however many days the tournament lasts. Sometimes that means you're going to blank or come in with only two or three fish. That's been why I've won so much and why I've finished so low sometimes. I'd rather blank in two tournaments and win one than finish in the top 20 in three tournaments."

The 2015 FLW Series Championship last year is illustrative of Roy's approach. He was one of the anglers who locked up to the Ohio River's Smithland Pool. In practice, he had enough good bites to conclude that the area held promise, but conditions there worsened as the tournament got underway.

"I thought I was in some big-fish water, but it couldn't compete with what was going on in the Kentucky Lake [dam] tailrace [where Texan Ray Hanselman won the tournament]. The conditions changed in the river from practice to the first day of the tournament, and I just couldn't figure it out – no excuses."

The Road Ahead

Hawk expects better results this year in the FLW Series Championship and entertains the notion that it will be a pathway to a Tour campaign in 2017. Outside of Lake Havasu, his home lake, he rates Table Rock as one of his favorite fisheries.

"A lot of people don't realize it, but Havasu has just about everything a bass fisherman is likely to encounter wherever he fishes. It's really taught me a lot," he says. "There are so many different patterns and techniques in play all the time: vertical rock walls, brush piles, grass, ledges, reeds. You can tell yourself, 'Today, I'm going out and learning how to flip tules, matted grass and wood,' and you can do it because it's right there. Of course, Table Rock isn't a whole lot like Havasu, but if you can get locked in to the right pattern there, you can do all right. I've had a couple of good tournaments on Table Rock."

Springboard to the FLW Tour or a trail leading back to the Costa FLW Series Western Division? How Table Rock sets up for him in the championship will have a major bearing on Hawk's future, but in the larger scheme of things, he's prepared for whatever comes his way.

"I focus on being a better fisherman wherever I'm fishing. By doing that and developing consistency I'll win tournaments and keep making a living," notes Hawk. "Then, too, sometimes when I'm not doing so good I pray, 'Hey Lord, should I keep going, keep fishing?' He always says the same thing: 'Do your best and keep fishing.' It has never not worked out, so I'm just going to leave it up to Him and keep doing my best." ■

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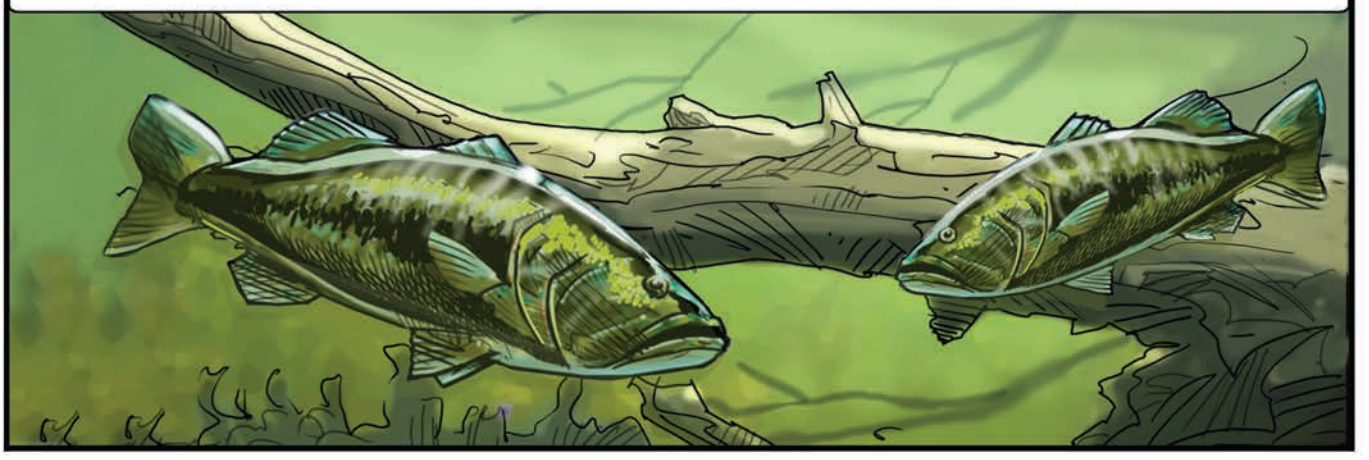
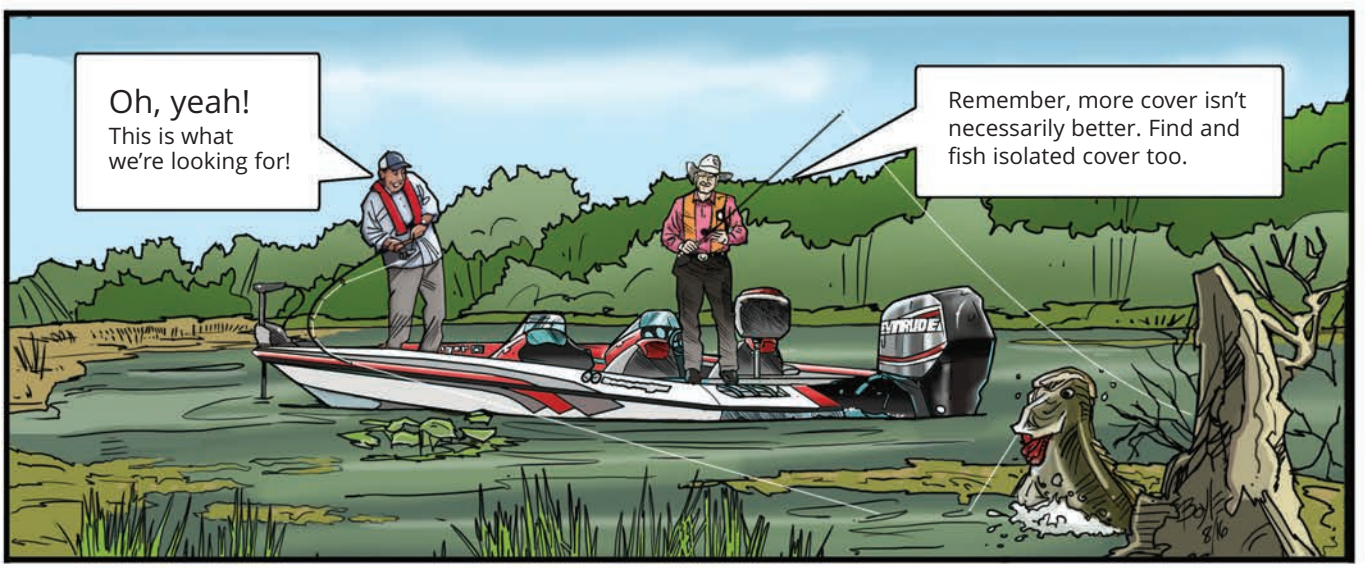
Sometimes it's better to narrow your choices and focus on the places where there's a limited amount of good cover, such as one treetop hanging out over a ledge, or a single dock. If bass only have one bit of good cover available, they'll tend to gather around it as long as there's plenty of forage and deeper water nearby.





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2016 FORREST WOOD CUP COVERAGE

THE CUP

PHOTO BY MATT PACE

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PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

THE TIN MAN

by Rob Newell

Disavowing conventional wisdom, John Cox won the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup in a simple aluminum boat, proving that bigger and faster isn't always better.

Sometimes winning bass tournaments is not so much about the actual technique used to catch the fish as it is just getting to the winning fish.

Such was the case with John Cox's 2016 Forrest Wood Cup victory at Wheeler Lake in early August. The Cup trophy that now resides in his home is the result of being able to reach the fish and not necessarily the techniques he used to catch them.

"Once they got to where I was fishing, anybody else could have caught them," Cox says.

But the reason "anybody else" didn't catch them is because "anybody else" in a conventional 21-foot glass boat with a 250-hp outboard couldn't have reached the area where Cox found his winning fish as easily as the champion did.

Cox's boat was smaller and lighter. His 20-foot aluminum Crestliner with a 200-hp Mercury Verado allowed him to hop over numerous logs as he journeyed his way some six miles back into skinny Cotaco Creek to uncover an untapped population of resident bass.

Over the course of four days, Cox plucked 54 pounds, 13 ounces of bass, mostly from Cotaco Creek, to become the first pro angler to win a national professional bass fishing championship from an aluminum boat. In the process he earned the nickname "Tin Man" within the bass fishing world for his use of a "tin" boat. The vitals to his victory were his vessel, the area and then the lures.

Running Tin

An aluminum boat has been Cox's calling card on the Walmart FLW Tour since he won a Red River Tour event out of a tin boat in his rookie season in 2011. He has owned full-sized glass bass boats in the past, but he returned to aluminums because they are more efficient for his style of fishing: shallow-water stump jumping.

Cox is the first to admit that there are downsides to aluminums when compared to glass. But for every negative, Cox counters with a positive.

Here, he breaks down some of the key differences:

1. Speed – Aluminums are slower than glass, but being passed by faster boats, especially at takeoff, does not bother Cox one bit.

"I'm simply not a speed freak," Cox laughs. "Even when I could go fast I didn't. On the last glass boat I owned, I put 658 hours on the motor, and only like four of those hours were over 5,700 RPM. The rest were at 3,500 to 4,500 RPM.

"I'm not into boat racing," he adds. "In my opinion, if you're having to race

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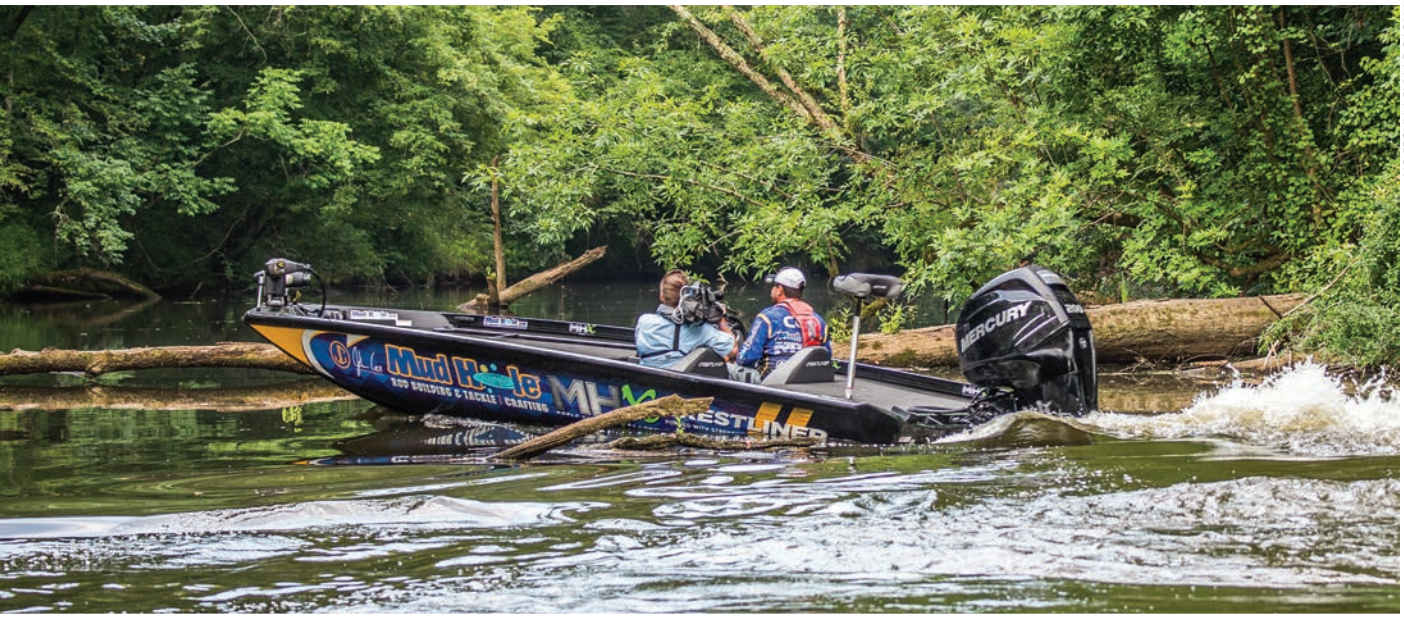

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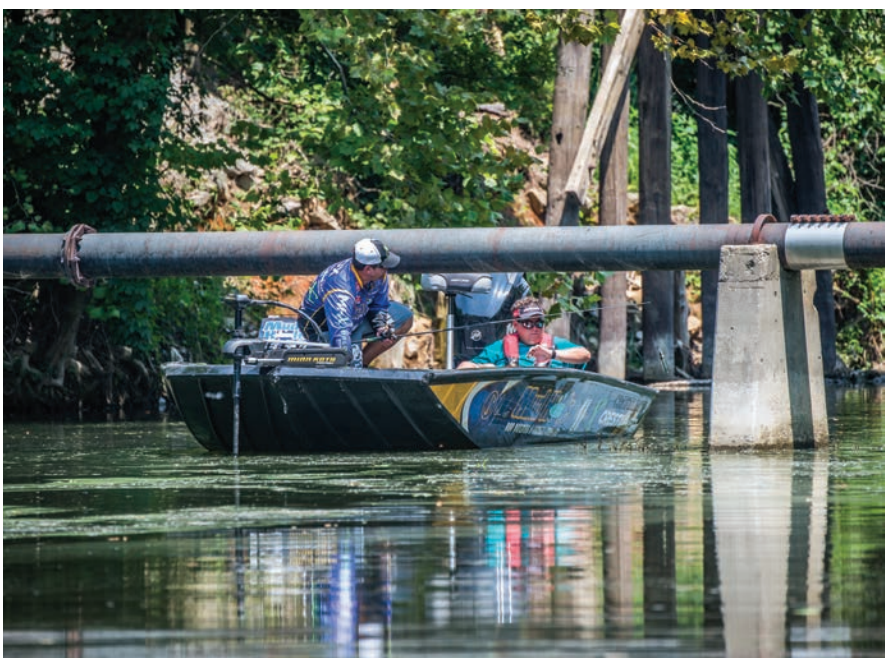

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

others to a fishing spot, it's not the winning spot anyway."

Cox actually enjoys the window of time shortly after takeoff when all the boats have passed him and he is still coasting down the lake.

"It gives me a few more minutes to think about my game plan," he says. "I like studying the subtleties of banks as I cruise down the lake. Noticing how a bank flattens out here, or the water color changes there, or a heron is spearing shad on a point over there – I can't see those details when I'm ripping down the lake at 70 mph with tears streaking out of my eyes."

2. Fuel capacity – Fuel capacities of aluminums are typically inferior to glass boats as well. Cox's current boat holds just 32 gallons, which pales in comparison to the tanks in bigger glass boats. But Cox insists that problem has largely been offset by four-stroke outboards becoming smaller and lighter.

"Four-strokes used to be so big and heavy that putting one on an aluminum defeated the purpose of having an aluminum," Cox says. "But now four-strokes are smaller, so I can take advantage of their ultra fuel efficiency. My Verado is a 200-hp motor, and it's stunning how little gas that thing uses. My range with 32 gallons is far more than I ever need."

3. Rough-water handling, space and stability – Glass proponents also tout

New FLW Tour Rules Helped Cox

In 2016, FLW enacted two new rules at the Forrest Wood Cup that played into John Cox's favor in winning the event. First, pros were allowed to use their own boats all four days of the event. Second, this year's Cup featured non-fishing marshals instead of co-anglers. Cox believes both changes helped propel him to victory.

"Obviously, using my own boat all four days was a big help," Cox says. "That was a huge incentive to keep pushing my way up that [Cotaco] creek. I knew the farther I went and the more logs I jumped, the better my chances of separating myself from the rest of the competitors."

Cox also believes that having a co-angler the first two days, like in a regular-season Tour event, would have pressured his fragile area even more than necessary.

"Anybody who was with me who could cast a rod and reel would have caught fish out of there," he says. "With so many good fishermen as co-anglers, I'm guessing they could have easily pulled out another 12 pounds per day behind me. But not having a co-angler allowed me to fish how I needed and manage those fish carefully. There was not much left in that place on the final day. If 15 to 25 pounds had been removed by co-anglers, it no doubt would have cratered my chances of winning."

COX
MERCURY
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Bait and Switch

When sampling creeks and backwaters during practice, Cox takes an interesting approach to his fishing. During practice he intentionally fishes with a different set of lures than the ones he plans to throw in the tournament.

This was the case at the Cup on Wheeler.

"During practice, all I am looking to do is cover water and get a couple bites," Cox says. "I just want fish to show themselves. At the Cup, I found those fish [in Cotaco] on a spinnerbait. I caught one on it, then rolled my hook over and had a couple of more good ones boil on it. That's all I needed to see."

Other search lures Cox employs during practice include heavily-weighted pitching plastics that sink fast, and topwater walking baits.

Once he returns in the tournament, Cox brings his shallow-water A-team, including swim jigs, buzzbaits, ChatterBaits, buzzing toads, floating frogs, lighter pitching plastics and a wacky-rigged Yamamoto Senko.

His winning lure at the Cup ended up being a Jackall lobee frog in bluegill or black, which he tied to 50-pound-test braid on his own custom-built frog rod – a 7-foot, 4-inch, fast-action, heavy-power rod built on an FP885-MHX blank. He also mixed in a white 1/4-ounce buzzbait for a few other keepers during the week.

"That duckweed is really what forced me to commit to those surface lures," Cox says. "I caught a couple other tiny keepers in another creek on other stuff, but the frog was the deal for the bigger fish in that scum."

PHOTO BY ANDY MORGAN

better rough-water handling, more room and better stability, all of which mean little to Cox when compared to the trade-offs he gains in a lightweight aluminum.

"I'm not looking to run to Pelee Island on Erie," Cox says. "That's not my style. If we go to a big lake and it's rough, I stay close. It doesn't bother me.

"As far as storage room goes, I carry, like, six rods and a couple bags of tackle – that's it," he continues. "I'm not trying to store 42 rods under a deck and manage hundreds of pounds of magnum spoons, swimbait heads, drop-shots and 10-inch worms. I have plenty of room for what I carry."

4. Shallow-water performance – What Cox does relish is an aluminum boat's ability to get on plane quickly in shallow water. His rig gets on plane in just a foot of water with his Atlas jack plate all the way up. Instead of idling for miles because he can't find "enough water" to get up on pad, he is able to jump up fast and buzz in and out of backwaters with ease. And when he hits something on plane, which is inevitable with his fishing style, he says the boat tends to "pop up" instead of "torqueing sideways."

"Trust me, I've hit plenty of stuff in both glass and aluminum boats, and the aluminum is so much more forgiving," he says. "The boat goes up and over, and most of the time I hardly even feel it."

Cox has also "planted" both types of boats on sandbars.

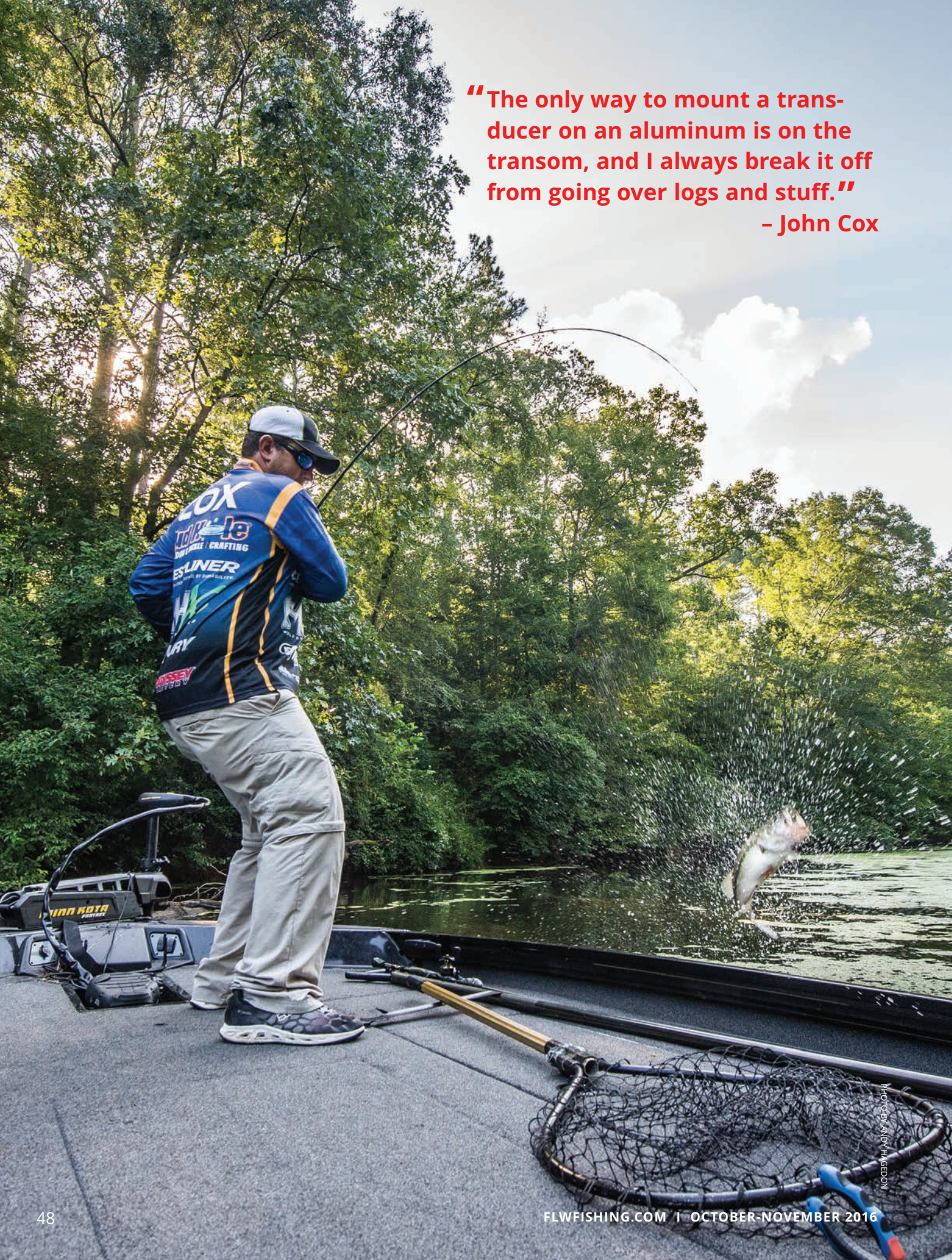
"With glass you have to call your buddies to come help push or tow you off," he adds. "With aluminum, I just get out, push off and I'm on my way."

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDOON



"The only way to mount a transducer on an aluminum is on the transom, and I always break it off from going over logs and stuff."
– John Cox

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

5. Electronics rigging – Cox says the only thing that really bothers him about aluminums is not being able to "glass in" a transducer into the hull as you can do in a glass boat.

"The only way to mount a transducer on an aluminum is on the transom, and I always break it off from going over logs and stuff," Cox says. "I had a new transducer on for the Cup and broke it off in practice, so I didn't even have a depth finder in competition. I honestly could not even tell you how deep my best spot was. I still have no idea."

Cotaco Was Money

On the first day of practice for the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup, Cox put all the advantages of his aluminum boat to work, buzzing, hopping, jumping and plowing his way far up into Cotaco Creek.

"What really helped me in practice was low water," Cox says. "It was down about 8 inches, and that's what gave me a big advantage in the aluminum. If the water had been up like it was in the tournament, I think guys in glass boats could have found the same area."

Cox's key area back in Cotaco was a bit wider, straighter and deeper than the rest of the creek. Big trees cast dense shade that protected the water from the sizzling August sun. A look at Google Earth reveals that Cotaco is also a drainage for several springs in the area where Cox was fishing, which helped keep the water cool.

"I'm not sure how much cooler it was back there," Cox says. "My transducer was broken off. But I'm guessing maybe 8 to 10 degrees cooler. If you put your hand in the water, you could

definitely tell it was cool. And there was bait everywhere. The place just looked and felt awesome."

Once Cox started sampling the creek with a rod and reel in practice, it didn't take him long to determine what lived there.

"I caught a good one on a spinnerbait, rolled the hook over and had a couple more good bites," Cox says. "Then my brother, who was practicing with me, caught a couple of nice ones. As we were leaving the creek, he said, 'This is Money Creek, baby!'

"I thought he was serious," Cox laughs. "I said, 'Is this really called Money Creek?' I had no idea where we were."

Duckweed

When Cox returned to Cotaco the first day of the tournament, he got a little surprise in his preferred stretch.

"There was duckweed everywhere," he says. "I have no idea where it came from. I guess it washed down from above. There had been some duckweed in the little feeders and sloughs off the main creek, so maybe it all floated out when the water came up. A lot of it had piled up against the laydowns where I wanted to fish.

"All I knew is that duckweed means frog fishing, so I tied on a floating frog," he continues. "It was game on. When I skipped that frog up under a tree to a mat of duckweed, a good one would blast it. It was crazy."

Cox took an early lead on day one with 16 pounds, 11 ounces, and from that point on, the rest was history. Cox would go on to pull another 15 pounds, 10 ounces from Cotaco on day two to build a lead of 6 pounds, 7 ounces at halftime.

Though he tried a couple of other backwater areas on days three and four, he always returned to Cotaco to keep his competitors at bay, winning the event wire-to-wire with final limits of 11 pounds and 11-8.

He says the area changed each day due to fluctuating water levels, his fishing pressure and the duckweed sliding around, but the changes really didn't require much in the way of a tactical change. He just kept walking the frog at a very slow speed past visible cover and under shady trees, plus anywhere the duckweed mats were thick.

"Getting up there to find that area in practice was the key to the whole thing," Cox says. "I really didn't know if it would hold up for four days, but it did." ■

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

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CUP CONTENDERS

HOW THE TOP FINISHERS AT WHEELER LAKE UNLOCKED A TRICKY LATE-SUMMER BITE

All in all, the larger patterns uncovered by the top finishers at the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup at Wheeler Lake weren't too surprising to anyone who's fished the Tennessee River in summer. Pros mostly targeted schooling bass on or near the main lake and resident bass in the extreme shallows up tributary creeks.

Yet, the specifics of where and how the top 20 caught their fish are intriguing. There were shallow-water springs and discharge pipes that attracted bass to key banks. Tricky runs across mud-shallow backwaters made access a big part of success too. And smallmouths anchored many bags, especially for the pros targeting schoolers.

We saw old-school lead jigging spoons, popping corks, frogs, buzzbaits (fished all day long, by the way), shallow-shots and quite a few pitching jigs.

Searing heat challenged pros' endurance, while daily – and refreshing – pop-up storms opened brief pattern windows.

On the forage side, a mayfly hatch occurred on day two, but the bigger factor was the nearly endless supply of pinky-sized young shad that made it tough just to tempt bass into biting a shad imposter.

Of course, perhaps the most notable pattern at the Cup was the one that was missing: a true offshore ledge pattern. It was nonexistent to the surprise of most pros in the field.

In the end, John Cox's magic creek was just right for Cup victory. Here's how the crew behind him dealt with Wheeler's summer challenges.

2 MICHAEL NEAL

by Jody White

50LBS, **10**OZ

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Michael Neal was like a sharpshooter, holding back his topwater while waiting to fire at any schooling fish that busted the surface.

PHOTO BY ROB NEWELL

Michael "Real Deal" Neal relied exclusively on schooling fish to bank his second top-10 finish in the Forrest Wood Cup.

While some pros that were chasing schoolers hopped from point to point, Neal milked one spot that he found in pre-practice the entire time.

"I honestly thought this tournament was going to be won offshore, and to my knowledge nobody caught them out there. In pre-practice, I looked deep – 'electronics deep' and 'cranking deep' [where it's too shallow for electronics] – and never did find them," says Neal. "On the lower end, there's really not more than six or eight good-looking places on a contour map to have offshore fish, and I was looking at one of them and saw them come up schooling on it."

The spot was just a shallow pea gravel point that tapered off to about 25 feet deep before dropping down out of fishing range. Nearly every point on the lower end of the lake had schooling fish on it, but Neal's spot had more and bigger fish on it than anywhere else and held them from pre-practice through the last cast of the tournament.

While others made repeated casts to schooling fish, Neal took a different approach, electing to wait them out with topwater in hand, ready to throw to any busting fish within reach. In pursuit of stealth, Neal used his Power-Poles the majority of the time, only occasionally kicking on his trolling motor to make a move and running only his HydroWave and livewell.

Neal says that back home on Chickamauga, schooling fish can usually be tempted to take a walking topwater when they aren't actively breaking, but after trying that and about everything else, he reverted to the waiting game during the tournament. The one exception was his use of a Carolina rig to try and artificially induce schooling action.

"It would fire them up," says Neal of the rig. "They sat in about three places, and they would start in one place and move over to where I was sitting. You could take that Carolina rig and get a bite, and the rest of the fish would start moving. So if you could catch one and get it in quickly and take it off, about the time you would pick up your topwater rod a fish would bust."

If he could hit that busting bass with a topwater, Neal could very likely put a keeper in the boat. Naturally he lost some and missed some, but the fish were there for yet another tremendous finish from the "Real Deal."

NEAL'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Neal's approach certainly was unique, but the real key was adding a feathered treble to his topwater after day one. The first day, Neal weighed 10 pounds, 2 ounces for 18th. On day two, he weighed 15-12 and rocketed up to second place. On days three and four, he boxed 12-0 and 12-12, respectively.

Early August found Wheeler Lake brimming with tiny shad, which left many pros struggling for bites. On Neal's spot, small shad swimming together in clouds the size of a boat were sometimes visible. With so much small bait in the water, it was hard for a lure to compete. Some pros pulled out crappie jigs and popping corks, but Neal opted to add a feather to a mostly clear topwater.

"I started using a feather on my hook the second day, and it made a difference in the number of bites I got in those schools," Neal says. "I don't know what it is about that feather, but it works on schooling fish."

3 | TODD AUTEN

by Kyle Wood

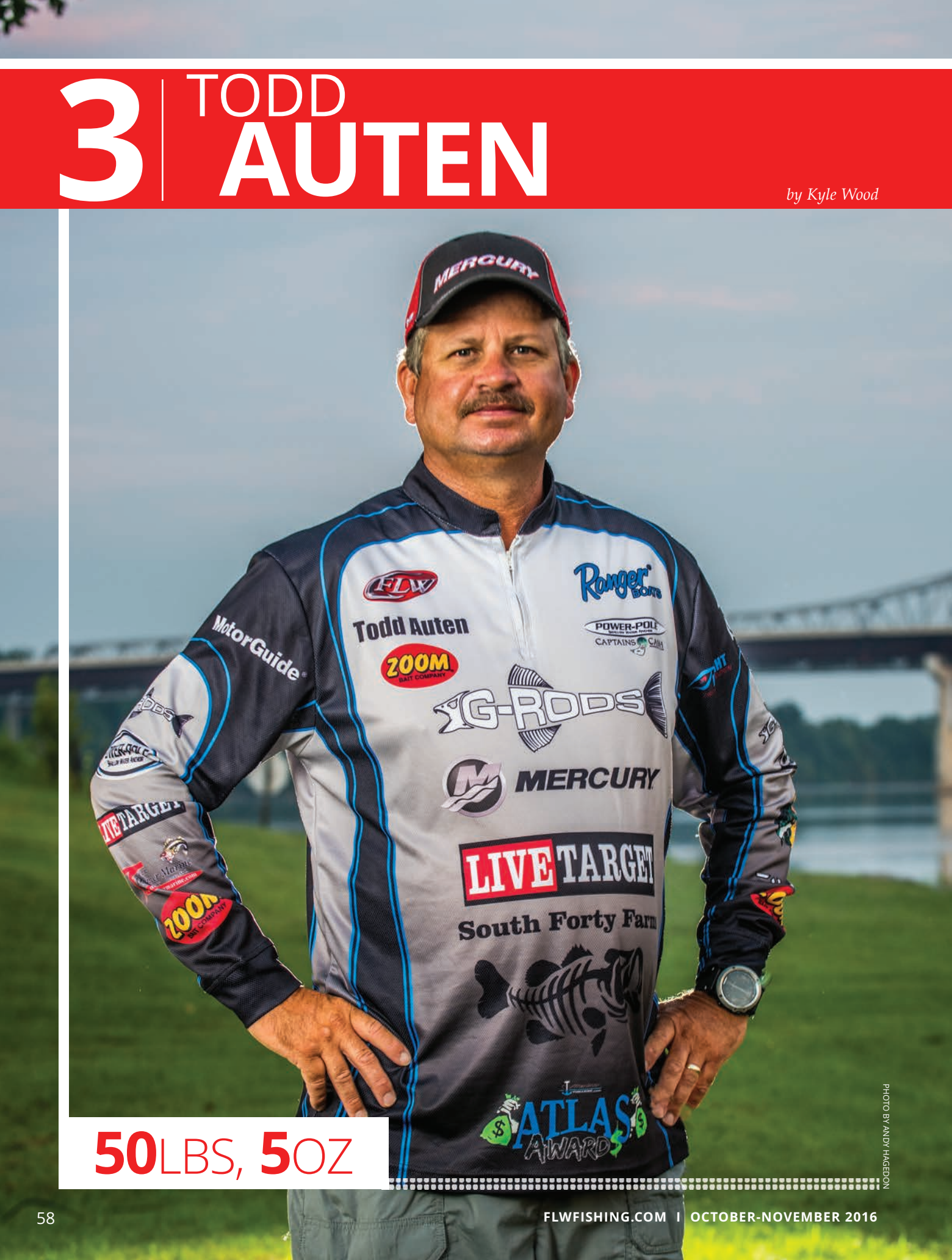


PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

50LBS, **5**OZ

Todd Auten is known for his love of working a vibrating jig or buzzbait around shallow cover, so his high finish using shallow techniques at the Cup came as no surprise to most folks who know him. Still, at first Auten wasn't certain about how well the shallow creeks would play, and he had to dial in the details as the tournament progressed.

His strategy at first was to catch a quick limit to start the day by capitalizing on schooling activity, which was heavy across the lake, before moving to skinnier water to upgrade. To execute, Auten kicked off the event with a spinning rod and Texas-rigged Zoom Fluke in his hand. That bite fizzled faster than he expected, so Auten adjusted his search toward the backs of creeks close to takeoff. He was only able to scratch one keeper out of a creek on day one, giving him four fish for 10 pounds, 12 ounces.

Despite the slow start, Auten didn't scrap the shallow program. Instead, the 12-year Tour pro leaned on areas he knew held fish from pre-practice and banked on the shallow bite to save his tournament.

A 1/2-ounce black and blue Z-Man ChatterBait with a matching Zoom UV Speed Craw and a 1/2-ounce Zorro Baits Booza Brush Bug of the same color with a Zoom Super Chunk trailer became his primary weapons up shallow. He also caught some fish on a prototype 1/2-ounce Zorro Baits buzzbait. They all accounted for his two biggest bags of the tournament in the subsequent days – 14-6 and 17-10, respectively.

Auten spent most of the last three days working the back of Second Creek and a small creek up the Elk River that held quality bass, though not quantity. Both areas featured a mix of a little current, plenty of bait, a deeper creek channel and many laydowns. Auten hit everything he could with the ChatterBait and at times would swim the Zorro jig to offer a different look.

"I started swimming the jig and noticed they reacted to it a lot better," he explains. "I don't know if they don't see it that often or what, but it made a difference."

Second Creek was by far the best area for Auten. He says it was even better on the third day when pre-frontal conditions greeted the field and extra current was flowing due to the opening of the Wheeler Dam lock. On the final day, his areas were simply tapped out, and Auten brought in only three keepers to slip from second to third.

A wizard with a buzzbait, ChatterBait and jig, Auten worked his magic in shallow creeks to finish third.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

AUTEN'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Wheeler Lake is known for its stump- and laydown-infested flats and creeks. The obstructions can make navigation a little hazardous and time-consuming.

That's why Auten spent time at his home in South Carolina well before the Cup studying contour maps and satellite imagery of Wheeler to figure out the best way to gain access to the miles of backwater.

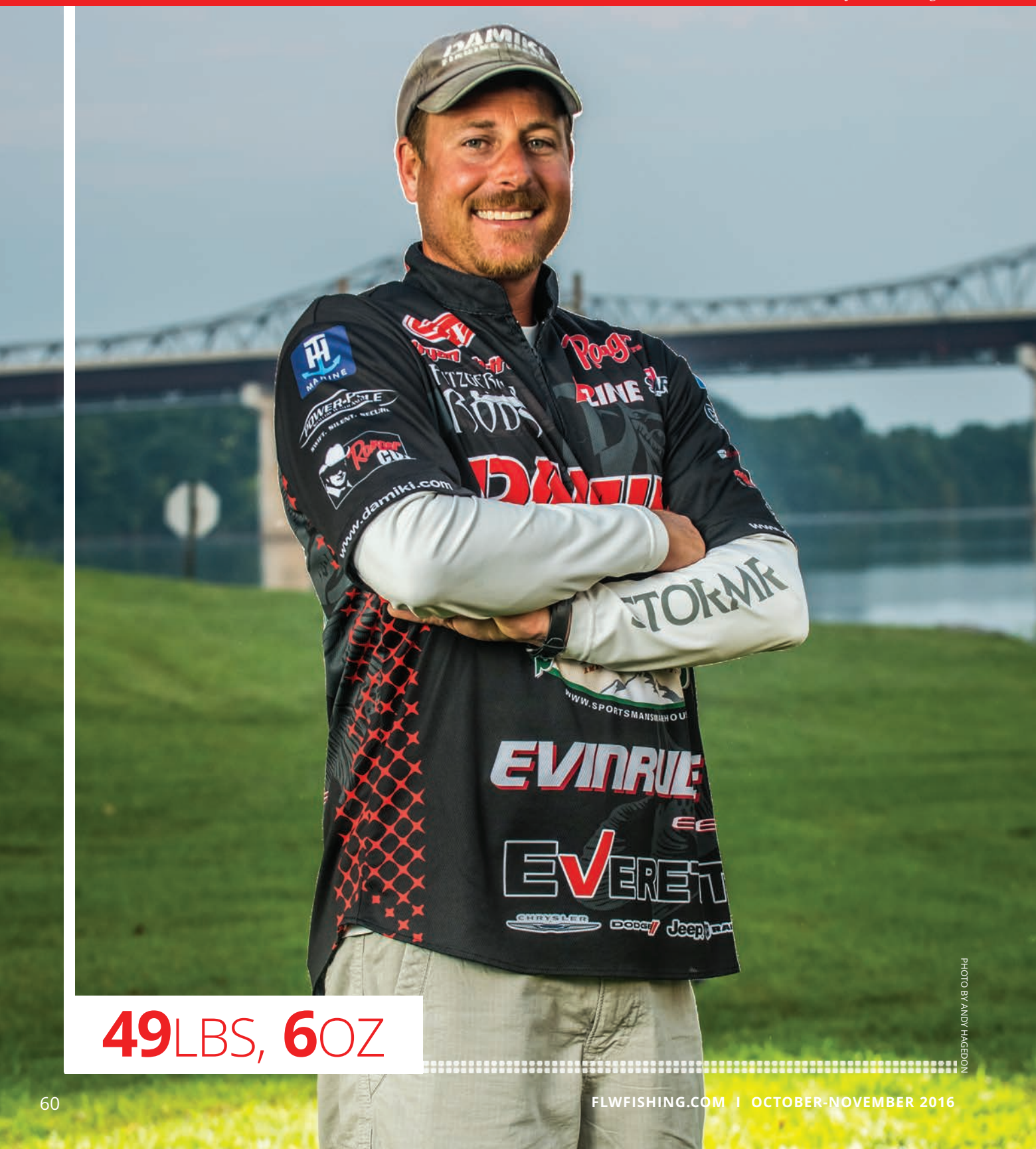
"Finding the channels with my electronics was the key to getting back into some of those places," says Auten. "I tried to find a few places I wanted to look at before I went there [for pre-practice].

"Once I got there for pre-practice I realized that my mapping on my electronics was pretty detailed, so I could trust them to run back in following the channel. It saved me a bunch of time when I wanted to look at other creeks because I didn't have to sit down to idle."

Map study ahead of time allowed Auten to find more key areas, and that helped to push him from 14th place on day one up to third, narrowly missing out on the title.

4 BRYAN THRIFT

by Chris Burgan



49LBS, **6**OZ

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Bryan Thrift earned the nickname "Smoke on the Water" for his blazing-fast fishing style. He seemingly always covers water and moves often. At the Cup, Thrift did run and gun in the afternoons, but he also showed the patience and versatility to slow down and thoroughly work an area.

While the tournament saw many anglers catch a large limit one day, then falter the next, Thrift was able to use this combo system to stay consistent throughout the event. He came out swinging on day one, bringing in 14 pounds, 7 ounces for third place, then followed with double-digit weights every day and never dropped out of the top six.

In the mornings, Thrift ran to the back of Wheeler Lake's creeks and targeted areas with wood, grass and shade. He had several creek stretches around the mid-lake area and the Elk River, including one stretch that he fished all four days where the fish would replenish overnight – though he never hit the spot twice in one day.

Thrift's technique was to Power-Pole down in the very back of a creek and slowly fan-cast a spayu-colored Damiki D Pop 70 popping-style topwater on 12-pound-test P-Line monofilament around laydowns.

"That Pop 70 walks really well," Thrift says. "I'd throw it next to the wood, and I'd basically just walk it in place."

THRIFT'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Thrift attributes his success to a key adjustment made on Saturday afternoon. His morning topwater bite carried him the first two days but only yielded one small keeper that third morning. Thrift decided to ditch the area and head out to his offshore spots. He turned his trolling motor on high and began heading to the main lake. In order to not waste any time on his way out, Thrift picked up a swim jig and made a few quick casts.

Somewhat unexpectedly he hooked a quality keeper that keyed him in on what the fish were looking for.

"I actually got pretty lucky," Thrift says. "I guess they just wanted it a little lower in the water column."

The switch paid off almost immediately as Thrift caught 13 pounds in 10 minutes. He worked the jig with a straight retrieve, using the same fan-casting strategy as with the topwater lure. Thrift used two primary swim jigs and fished them on a Fitzgerald Rods Bryan Thrift Signature Series Skipping Special paired with a 7:1 gear ratio reel and 20-pound-test P-Line fluorocarbon.

Instead of having to rely solely on the offshore bite that didn't pan out as hoped, Thrift was able to relocate his primary fish. The swim jig pattern effectively replaced the topwater bite and propelled Thrift to his eighth Forrest Wood Cup top 10.

After thoroughly working the area, Thrift picked up his Power-Poles, moved about 40 yards and repeated the process.

On the weekend, his pattern shifted slightly. Thrift picked up a hand-tied swim jig or a Damiki Mamba Jig in natural colors to work the same areas, casting out and bringing the jig back with a steady retrieve.

With either technique, Thrift slowly milked the shallow creeks to catch his limit each morning. Later in the day, we saw some classic Thrift fishing, akin to his 2015 Tour win at Lake Eufaula. He left the creeks and ran 25 to 30 deep brush piles scattered around Wheeler's lower half using a mix of baits that included worms, jigs and swimbaits. It's the program that Thrift focused on most during practice, and the one that he had expected to give him his best shot at winning.

"I was trying to catch a big one," Thrift explains about his brush pile pattern. "I only ended up catching one or two itty-bitty ones."

One part thoroughly working shallow cover plus one part running and gunning deep brush earned Thrift another top 10.

PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH

5 | JEREMY LAWYER

by Dominick Schenewerk

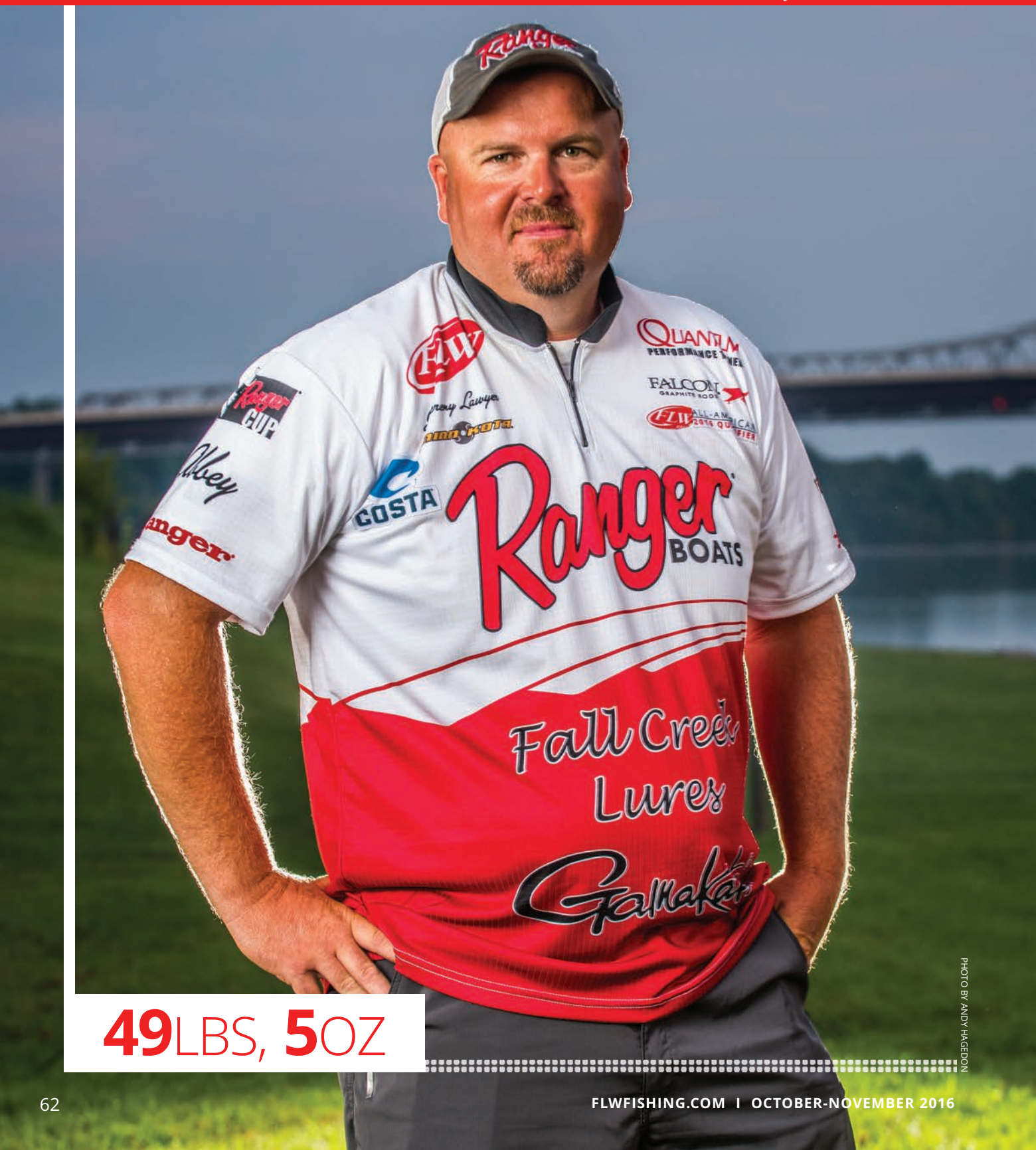


PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

49LBS, **5**OZ

Jeremy Lawyer, the 2016 FLW Bass Fishing League All-American winner from Sarcoxie, Mo., was able to plow his way through the field and into the top five by targeting schooling bass that were feeding on baitfish on main lake and secondary points within sight of the Wheeler Dam.

Lawyer began the first day by running to a handful of spots that had held balls of bait for him in practice, but fishing pressure forced him to adjust his approach.

"I had four points that had groups of schooling fish that I really thought I would have to myself, and I could make a rotation with them throughout the day," says Lawyer. "I tried to get on several places that other guys were on [on day one], but had to sit down on the last one that was open. I stayed there for the rest of the day."

Lawyer caught his first limit of 8 pounds, 15 ounces using a Yellow Magic popper custom-painted by Fall Creek Lures in a color Lawyer calls "Forrest Wood Cup shad" and a 4-inch sexy shad-colored Keitech swimbait.

Lawyer added a homemade 1/2-ounce white jigging spoon to his arsenal for day two. The addition was based on a gut feeling he had while retying in his boat that morning, and the spoon produced most of his fish the rest of the event. He also remained camped on the same spot as day one.

"I would throw it [the spoon] up there in 1 to 3 feet of water. I'd let it go to the bottom, and then rip it or crank the reel handle real quick and then let it flutter down to make them react," Lawyer says "The fish weren't trying to eat; they were just reacting. That's why I lost so many, but the good ones had it in their mouth."

When the bite died down, Lawyer tried some bold techniques to get the bass feeding again, with mixed results. He tried corralling the baitfish back onto the point by chasing them around with the trolling motor. He used the big motor to run circles around the point to stir up the bait. And he experimented with his HydroWave turned to a high-frequency setting.

Lawyer caught the big bass of the tournament – a 6-plus-pounder – on day three on the first cast that he made with a LIVETARGET BaitBall Series Threadfin Shad TDD-70 crankbait, but he stuck with the homemade spoon for the rest of the tournament as his go-to limit getter. He would then fatten up his limit by stopping near Decatur for a final cull during his drive back to takeoff.

LAWYER'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Attitude and a spoon were Lawyer's keys to success. The critical move of spontaneously tying on a spoon just 10 minutes before the day-two takeoff was the changeup that really allowed Lawyer to make the top-20 cut and then sneak into the final day.

Sitting in 10th place on Sunday, Lawyer had basically no pressure on his spot from other anglers, and he went fishing with the attitude that he had nothing to lose. After all, he could only move up in the standings. Therefore, he fished loose and relaxed and was able to catch some critical fish that helped him nail down fifth place.

Lawyer also attests that good decisions – most of them based on inexplicable gut feelings – and using his momentum from his charge up the BFL ranks allowed him to roll with the more experienced Tour pros throughout the event.

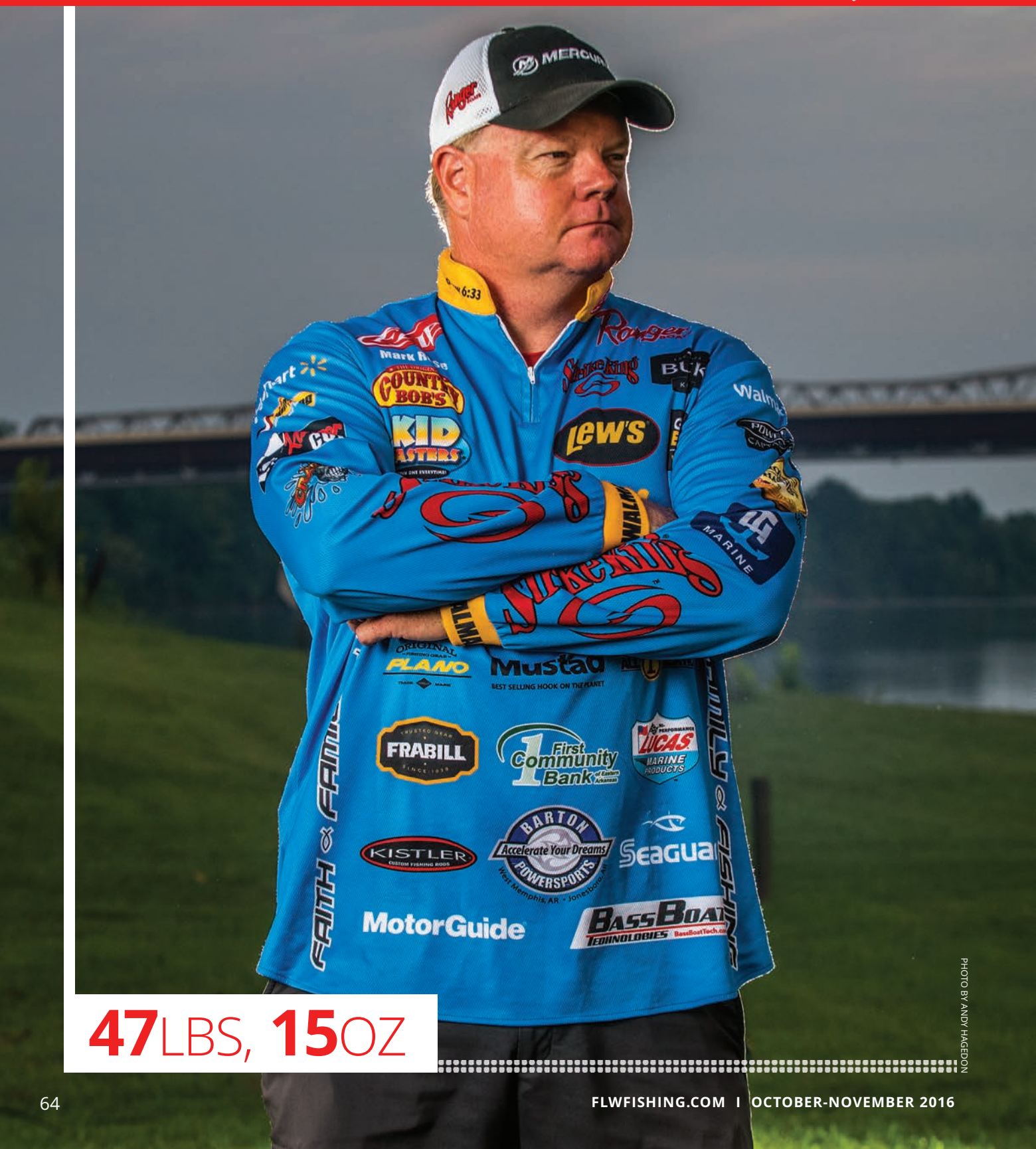
"When you have some momentum going from some previous tournaments, and you are making good decisions and you're fishing good, it just continues," he adds. "It seemed like if I made a decision, it seemed like the right one, and it just really worked out."

Lawyer camped on a schooling spot to make the top 10. He used a few baits, but most notable was a 1/2-ounce spoon.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

6 | MARK ROSE

by Colin Moore



47LBS, **15**OZ

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

"I guess I'm just the middleman in all this," quipped Mark Rose after John Cox was proclaimed the champion of the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup.

Indeed, the Arkansas angler was near the middle of the standings at tournament's end, having wound up sixth overall after placing fifth, seventh and sixth in the previous three rounds.

Finishing as high as he did was a testimonial to Rose's versatility, however, as he had to abandon his usual deep-water game, lighten up his tackle and go shallow to stay in the hunt.

"I tried to find some kind of offshore bite in practice, but for some strange reason it just wasn't happening for me or anybody else, or at least not to the extent I would have needed to win," says Rose.

Instead, he went looking for schools of bass that were waylaying shad moving in and out of creek mouths. Rose alternated between First Creek and Second Creek near Wheeler Dam during the middle hours of each day, though first thing in the morning he picked random keepers off the shoreline with a buzzbait, typically fishing main-lake banks with pea gravel or riprap.

"My [Tour] roommate, Greg Bohannan, told me he got a little buzzbait bite going in practice, so that's what made me decide to try it – good thing," recalls the Arkansas pro. "Until about 9 o'clock in the morning, the baitfish weren't stirring much, and there wasn't any schooling activity to speak of where I was fishing."

Rose relied on soft plastics for the bulk of his four limits weighed in during the event. Once the morning bite slowed, he switched from a 3/8-ounce buzzbait with a toad trailer to a 1/8-ounce shaky head paired with a 6 1/2-inch Strike King Finesse Worm in the morning dawn color.

Like several other competitors, the Arkansas pro noticed in practice some schooling activity inside and outside the mouths of various creeks, but the fish would only stay at the surface for a few seconds before following the shad into shallower water.

"They might be busting over 20 or 30 feet of water, but then they'd be gone so quick you couldn't get on them," adds Rose. "That didn't mean they weren't still hungry, though. Sometimes I could cast toward the bank onto a pea gravel point into about 6 or 8 feet of water and get bit coming out with it. Mainly, this was from about 9 until noon or 1 o'clock each day. After that, it was pretty much dead."

ROSE'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

In the Western movie *Quigley Down Under*, the hero of the tale is known for his skill with a Sharps rifle. At the end, however, the villain provides Quigley with a revolver and forces him into a gunfight. After he shoots his adversary with the Colt, Quigley tells him, "I said I never had much use for a revolver. I never said I didn't know how to use it."

In some ways, Rose is like Quigley when it comes to bass fishing. Though he's known as an offshore specialist, he's capable of getting the job done with other lures and techniques too. At the Forrest Wood Cup, it was abandoning a deep-water strategy early in the tournament that mainly helped him claim a high finish.

"I thought I was going to be fishing this tournament offshore, and that's how I expected to win it if I was going to win it at all," Rose reveals. "When I saw that wasn't going to happen, I switched to the buzzbait and to fishing shallow brush piles and points where there was some schooling activity going on. Being as versatile as possible has helped me win a lot of money and make a living."

In the opening round, Rose culled four times. Otherwise, he culled one or two keepers a day.

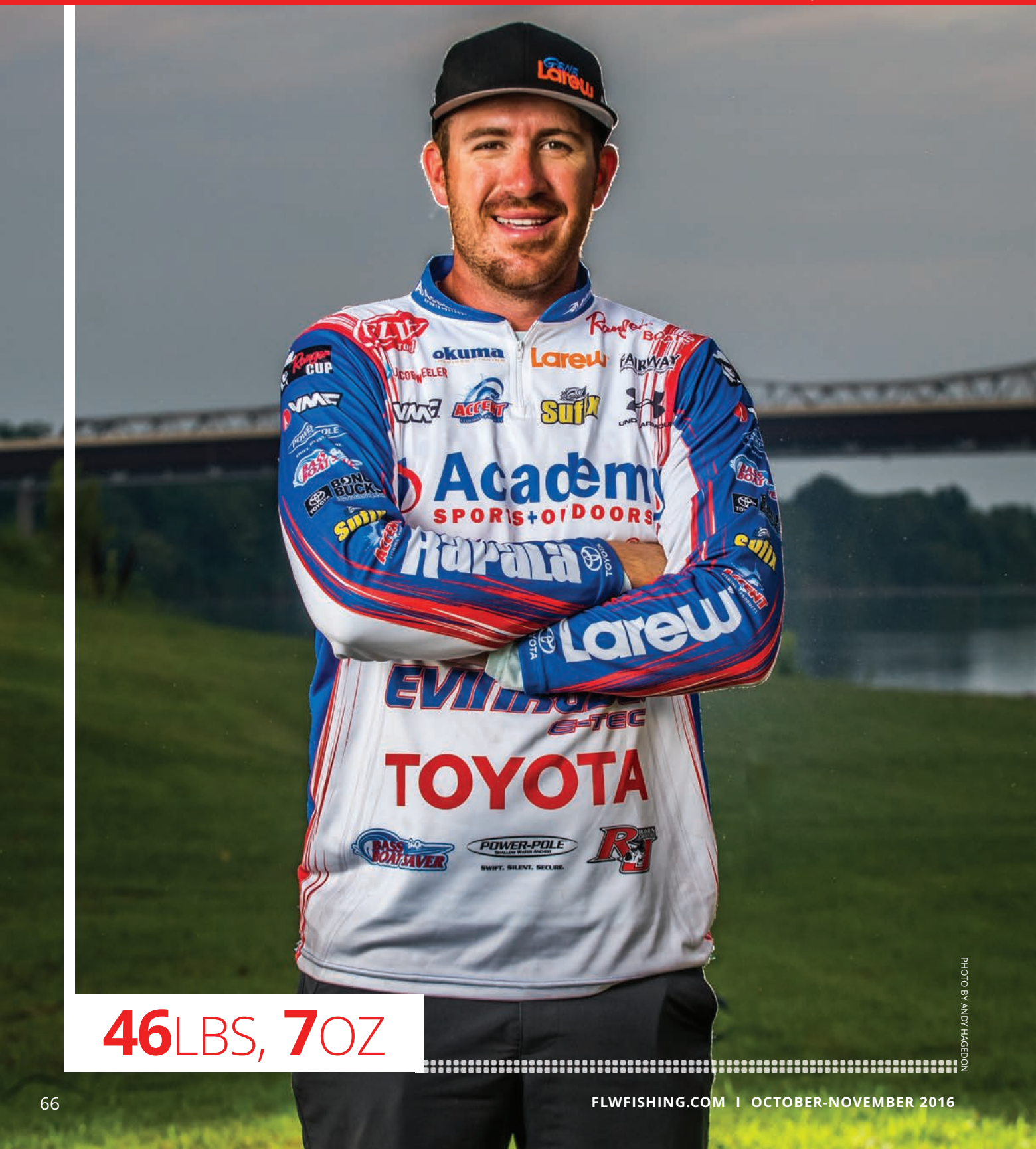
"In a four-day tournament, it isn't how many you catch, but how big your 20 keepers are," says Rose. "Except for a couple of guys like Michael Neal and Jeremy Lawyer, there just weren't a lot of fish being caught."

A buzzbait worked for Rose in the mornings. He switched to soft plastics for schoolers after that.

PHOTO BY DOMINICK SCHENEWERK

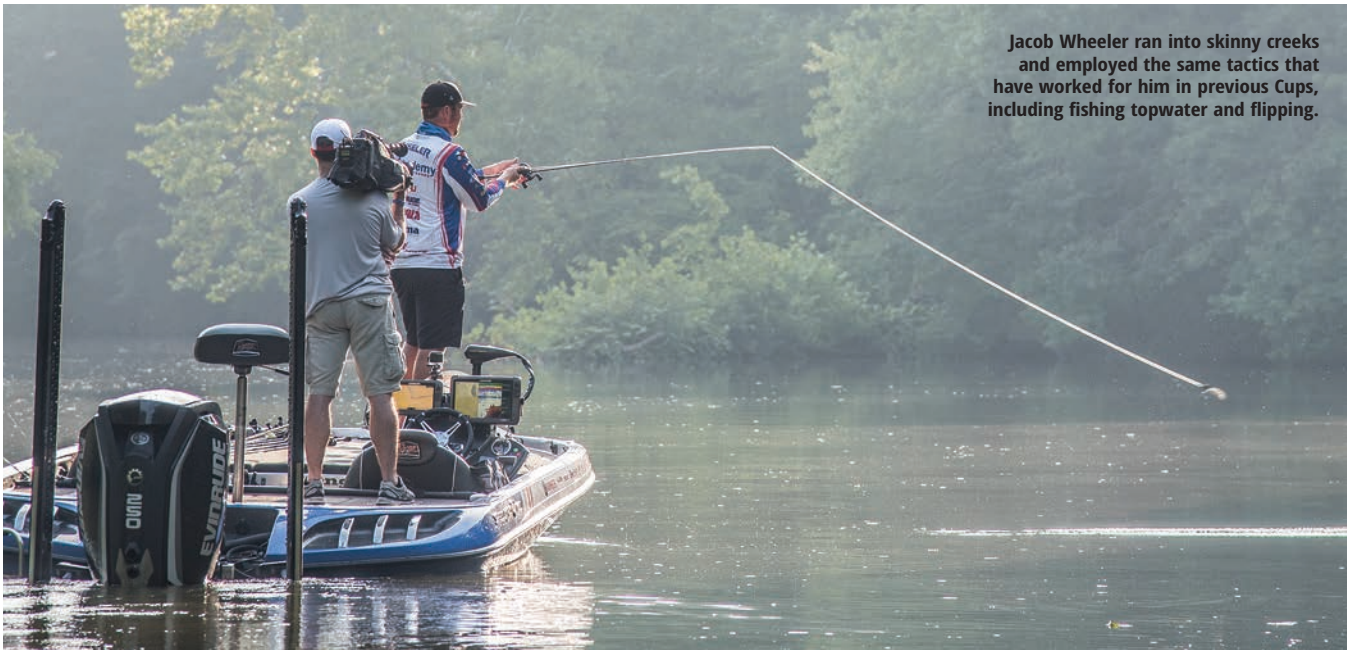
7 | JACOB WHEELER

by Curtis Niedermier



46LBS, **7**OZ

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON



Jacob Wheeler ran into skinny creeks and employed the same tactics that have worked for him in previous Cups, including fishing topwater and flipping.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

For creek rat Jacob Wheeler, there really was no other program to distract him from the shallow game at the Cup.

"My thing in August is I never bet on the deep bite. That's a losing game most of the time because the [deep] fish are scattered out," Wheeler says. "The only time I like to fish deep is May and June, when they're coming to you.

"In August there are really not many fish coming to you, so you have to fish the resident fish. It's the time of year that fish are starting to move shallow and transition back into their autumn patterns."

Wheeler says there was no bream spawn up shallow, and there really wasn't a consistent pattern in terms of depth, water clarity, current or cover. So instead, his strategy was to force his Ranger into the skinniest, most tucked-away places he could find to gain access to unpressured fish. During practice he covered water quickly with an Accent Game Changer Buzzbait and a Terminator Popping Frog to determine which creeks had promising concentrations of fish.

"Truthfully, some creeks have them and some creeks don't," he says. "In each creek I fished [in the tournament], there wasn't always a resemblance of the last creek."

In the tournament, Wheeler slowed down considerably and methodically picked apart his targets – mostly undercut banks, shade lines created by overhanging trees, lily pads and laydowns.

To improve his stealth, Wheeler set his Minn Kota on 20 to 30 percent, so he could slowly creep along without stopping and starting the prop, and so he could easily and quietly stop himself with his Power-Poles without dragging the poles across the bottom.

About 90 percent of Wheeler's bites came on wood cover, but his bait selection expanded during the tournament. He caught one key fish each with a black SPRO Bronzeye Frog fished around pads and a soft-plastic creature bait, and two keepers on a walking bait. The Terminator frog and Accent buzzbait with a toad trailer combined for seven keepers, while the other nine came by flipping wood with an E.R. Lures jig in magic craw swirl with a Minnesota flash-colored Gene Larew Punch Out Craw.

"I was really taking my time," he says. "I worked from outside in, flipping the outside, flipping midway up and then to the heart [of the laydowns]," Wheeler says. "That jig is not an original Arkie style. It's a modified Arkie, so it goes through wood 90 percent better than the original Arkie head."

WHEELER'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Wheeler's key to success was setting up his Ranger and Evinrude to run into and out of shallow creeks quickly and safely.

First, he removed more than 150 pounds worth of gear from his Ranger to make the boat easier to get on plane. He then outfitted his Evinrude G2 with a four-blade prop that provided the bite or "traction" needed to get up quickly and still have steering control at a high trim setting. He also relied on a fast-working Bob's Machine Shop hydraulic jack plate.

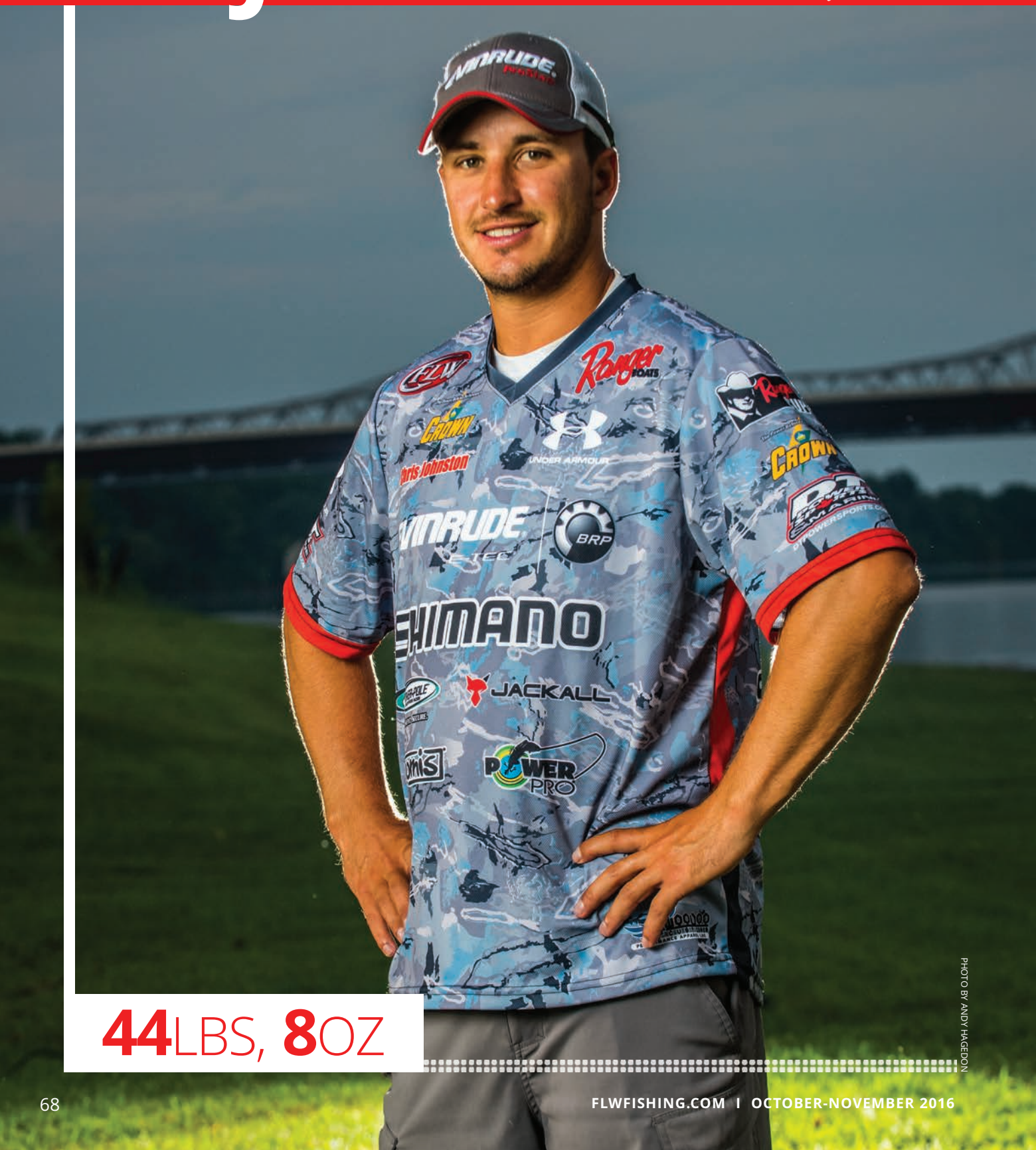
To get on pad, he raised the jack plate 8 inches, trimmed the motor all the way down and hammered the throttle. Once up, he quickly lowered the jack plate to make sure the motor's cooling intake was drawing in water – running it too high for too long can cause the engine to overheat – and trimmed up the motor to skirt across skinny water.

"A lot of guys thought I was crazy, but I figured out the system in practice," Wheeler says. "I tested it out on some mud flats to see how shallow I could be and still get the boat up. I could get up in 1.8 feet.

"Time is money in bass fishing, especially in the Forrest Wood Cup, where the bite is so tough. I needed every minute of fishing time I could get. I idled those places in practice. I knew where everything was – the holes and the logs. I could get up on pad in shallow water, and I knew where the creek channels were."

8 CHRIS JOHNSTON

by David A. Brown



44LBS, **8**OZ

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

Making his Forrest Wood Cup debut, Ontario's Chris Johnston stayed in Wheeler Lake's lower end and staked his entire event on schooling bass. Johnston fished between the Elk River and Wheeler Dam and caught his fish mostly on shallow points in 2 to 5 feet of water, but he had one clandestine spot that went overlooked by competitors.

"There was this one shoreline where a shoal came out from an underwater point, but the fish were actually schooling next to it over about 20 feet of water," Johnston says. "That spot was kind of an ace in the hole because no one found it. Every day, I caught two or three good fish off this spot."

Johnston caught all of his keepers on an Evergreen SB-105 pencil popper in the American shad color. He used a 7-foot, 2-inch, medium-power Shimano Cumara rod with an 8.5:1 Shimano Metanium XG baitcaster and 20-pound-test PowerPro braid.

"You needed that soft rod for throwing the topwater so when you set the hook, you didn't rip the bait out of its mouth," he says. "You had to use braid for the castability. You had to be able to throw that topwater 60 yards sometimes.

"When they'd blow up, you had to put that bait within a 1- to 2-foot radius of their boil, and you had to hit it within probably two seconds or you'd miss your chance," Johnston adds. "If you did hit that circle and you didn't get one in the first couple of twitches, you just weren't going to get a bite."

That's where the high reel speed came into play. Johnston often waited up to 30 minutes between frenzies, but the ability to gather line quickly allowed him to target more blowups when he spotted schoolers.

Johnston located six spots in practice, but competition allowed him to fish only three. He rotated through his available areas and found the schooling activity extending later than normal.

"You'd think first thing in the morning would be best for schooling fish, but it seemed like the fish were schooling a little better once the sun got up," he says. "On the third day, I caught my biggest one and a 2 1/2-pounder around 2:30.

"On the first day, someone started on one of my schooling spots. He left after the first hour and never came back because he thought they were done schooling. They were actually schooling a lot better later in the day, and that's when I caught a lot of my good fish."

JOHNSTON'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

With his tournament fortunes riding daily on the unpredictable schooling fish, Johnston did all he could to maximize each opportunity. The spots he targeted were littered with small fish, so in the interest of time management, he had to choose his targets wisely.

"If you saw a shad jump and you knew there was a blowup about to happen, you had to be able to tell which fish were the bigger ones," he says. "There was a bunch of 10- and 12-inch fish, and you had to pick out the big-fish boils, based on their intensity.

"Some of them would come out of the water, but with the ones that didn't, you could tell [the size of the fish] by the size of the blowup. The key was you had to get your bait right on the spot where you saw a blowup within two seconds."

Also essential was a topwater with a feathered rear treble. Johnston's Evergreen SB-105 sported a hook dressed with white feathers and green tinsel – an accent he's convinced played a pivotal role in his success.

"The shad in my areas were very small," he says. "I could actually see some of the fish come up like they were going to explode on the [artificial] bait, but they'd get close and then turn away. I think some of them mistook that feather for a small shad. I caught quite a few fish that only ate the back of the topwater bait. I know that got me a bunch of extra bites."

A "secret" schooling spot was part of Johnston's game plan.

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

9 BRANDON COBB

by Sean Ostruszka

44LBS, 4OZ

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

There was no doubt in Brandon Cobb's mind that backwater creeks would be "the deal" at Wheeler Lake. He was right, though not in the way he expected.

Cobb dedicated his entire pre-practice to looking at creeks, trying to find places like the creeks he exploits back home in South Carolina in the summer. He did the same the first day of official practice, but other than one particularly small creek that wasn't even on the map, most of his creeks didn't produce much.

"You could call it a creek, but really it was a ditch," says Cobb about his unmapped spot. "It was about two car lengths wide and 75 yards long. It had one laydown, one bush and one brush pile. The rest was slick bank and only 1 1/2 feet deep. It was a nothing creek, but I got four bites in there."

The next two practice days he dedicated to finding schooling fish, figuring he'd make the cut with them and then save the one creek for the final two days. After realizing many other pros were trying the schooling deal on day one of the tournament, Cobb scrapped everything and went to his tiny creek.

As nondescript as the creek was, Cobb would catch limits from it each of the next three days. Why they were in there to begin with is something Cobb figured out as he fished it.

"I'm pretty sure there was a natural spring in there," he says. The spring provided fresh, oxygenated water and helped trigger the food chain and attract bass – even smallmouths.

For three days, Cobb cycled through the only three pieces of cover in the creek arm, going round and round flipping a Zoom Baby Brush Hog with a 3/8-ounce tungsten weight or a 1/2-ounce Greenfish Tackle Skipping Jig in green pumpkin with a Zoom Super Chunk trailer in green pumpkin.

"That was really the only thing I had going, so I stayed in there and milked it," says Cobb. "By day three, though, I could tell I was taking more fish out than were replenishing."

After an early limit on Saturday, Cobb made a 66-mile run up the Elk River to the only other creek where he'd found success in practice. In an hour he culled out all his fish by flipping to isolated pieces of cover. Figuring he needed a big limit to contend, he made the long run again on Sunday, and again found plenty of fish by flipping. Only this time, the size wasn't there.

The only way Cobb could make it happen in his best areas was to slowly and thoroughly pick apart each target.

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

COBB'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Cobb loves fishing fast and covering water. However, with only one tiny primary creek, and said creek having only three targets, Cobb was forced to slow down. Turns out, he feels that is the only reason he succeeded.

"I usually flip to a piece of cover, hop it once or twice, reel back, and flip somewhere else. It's fast," says Cobb. "But with no other cover, I just kept flipping to the same stuff. I'd sometimes make 20 to 30 flips to that brush pile before getting bit. There was even one time I flipped the bush for 15 minutes before getting bit."

The only time Cobb touched his trolling motor was to reposition himself in order to again put his Power-Poles down. He also adjusted how he worked his lure.

"Instead of hopping it and reeling it in, I'd slowly drag it out like you would a worm," he explains. "It was the only way I could get bit. It also was the only way I could get bit on my other spot [up the Elk]. So if I hadn't learned I needed to slow down initially, I might've not caught fish anywhere else."

10 | JOSEPH WEBSTER

by Tyler Brinks

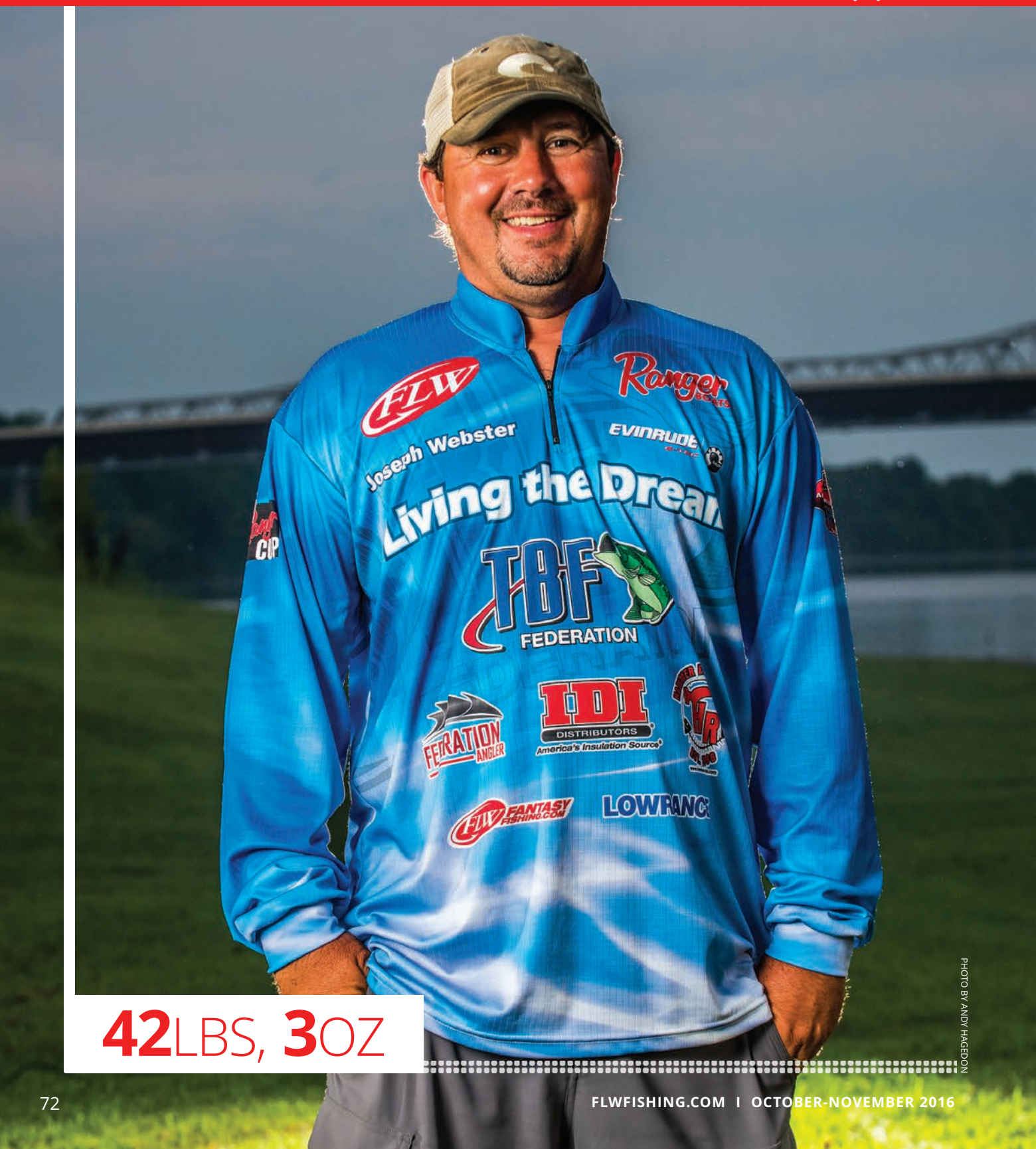


PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

42LBS, **3**OZ

Joseph Webster relied heavily on schooling fish for his 10th-place finish at the Forrest Wood Cup. Though he located several points with schooling activity, other anglers in the top 20 had found them too, and Webster eventually dedicated most of his time to fishing a single point on the lower end of the lake near First Creek and Second Creek.

The Bass Federation National Championship winner started out in the morning with a Lucky Craft Sammy 100 in the ghost threadfin shad color. Once the action died down around noon each day he switched to a drop-shot rig or a popping cork and fly rig, similar to what many saltwater anglers fish on the flats.

The popping cork and fly setup was something Webster used when he was younger for schooling striped bass, and he decided to try it going into the final two days. It accounted for nearly 20 keepers each day.

As the schooling action slowed, Webster rigged a 6-inch morning dawn Roboworm Straight Tail Worm on a drop-shot rig. This was his approach when the fish moved to deeper water on the end of the point, and it produced several keepers during the event.

Webster had two other areas that contributed to his catch, particularly on the second day, which proved to be his most challenging day as the schooling bite was shorter and there was less activity.

"At around noon I knew I had to do something since I only had three fish for less than 3 pounds," he recalls. "I wanted to go for the win, but I knew if I didn't get a limit and stay in the cut, I wouldn't have a chance to even fish another day."

The Mississippi angler adjusted and fished the drop-shot on a bridge piling closer to the launch site to catch a limit of spotted bass weighing 6 pounds, 13 ounces, which got him into the third day.

His other secondary area was a series of gravel bars and humps that he plied with a citrus shad Norman DD22 crankbait during the first day. With his boat positioned in 15 feet of water, Webster cast to gravel bars between 10 and 12 feet deep. He was able to catch key keepers on the first day from this location.

PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH

Webster saved his tournament on day two with a quick limit from a bridge that got him in the cut.

WEBSTER'S KEYS TO SUCCESS

Webster believes preparation prior to this tournament was the reason for his high finish. He lives just over an hour from Wheeler Lake, and during the pre-practice period he spent three days per week on the lake looking for deep fish. He spent considerable time looking for schools of offshore bass, but realized that was not going to be the key at the Cup because there simply weren't large groups of bass out deep.

The TBF champ found several points on the lower end of the lake during pre-practice where he caught some schooling fish on jerkbaits. This gave him a starting point for the official practice period and eventually became the area where he spent the majority of the four days of the tournament.

To maximize his success on the point he was fishing, Webster shut off his electronics and positioned his boat on the shallow top of the point, using his Power-Poles to anchor in 4 to 5 feet of water. He then cast out to deeper water where the bass were suspending. As the bass corralled the shad and pushed them to shallow water, Webster was waiting. This also allowed him to make shorter casts to reach the schooling fish and reduced the likelihood of spooking them as they came to him. ■

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PHOTO BY ROB NEWELL

12 SCOTTMARTIN

by Curtis Niedermier

32LBS, **3**OZ

Tactics

Martin exclusively targeted schooling fish on main-lake clay points near Wheeler Dam and believes he was around the quality of fish to win, but he had to share them with other top finishers.

"My fault was I couldn't rotate much. I was locked in, so I had to rotate baits," he says.

The schoolers busted at the surface mostly on the river-channel side of the points in about 15 feet of water, but occasionally they ran bait up into as shallow as 2 feet. Martin used a couple of other tricks to fire up his schools, including cranking his HydroWave up to an ultra-high frequency and casting from the bank out toward deep water. By the final day, he wasn't casting unless he saw a fish break the surface.

Baits

On day one, Martin was able to catch his fish by mixing it up with what he calls "normal" baits: M-Pack Jig, Fish Head Spin, LIVETARGET walking topwater bait and Tightlines UV Hawg.

"On day 2, I realized those fish are very, very smart," he says. "As soon as you showed them the same lure the next day, it turned them off. I couldn't get them to commit. I had to find something totally different that they hadn't seen."

He spent the next two days trying to mimic 1- to 1 1/4-inch shad by firing crappie lures, tiny Fish Head Spins, micro-swimbaits and even a small two-hook jerkbait that he "Frankensteined" into a mini wake bait by melting down the lip.

11 JIMMYREESE

by Tyler Brinks

32LBS, **7**OZ

Tactics

Reese located a series of main-lake clay points where schooling bass were feeding on shad. Catching them proved to be a challenge, as each day required a different approach due to pressure being applied by other competitors.

Fishing the points was his primary strategy, with the exception of the end of day one, when he moved closer to the launch ramp and found fish busting shad in open water near two long, flat points. Unfortunately, Reese couldn't repeat his success in the secondary area.

"In the last 20 minutes of the first day I was able to cull three times. I went back first thing on the second day and didn't get a bite in two hours," Reese recalls.

Baits

The biggest key for Reese was adjusting his bait selection for the day and continually trying new things to generate bites from the schooling fish. He weighed in fish caught on six lures: a shad-colored Yamamoto D-Shad soft plastic jerkbait, a margarita mutilator Roboworm Straight Tail Worm on a darter head jig, a white Bobby D's vibrating jig, a natural shad Keitech Swing Impact Fat swimbait, a chrome-blue popper and a homemade hair jig.

The homemade hair jig featured a darter-style head with white and green hair to imitate small shad. He relied on the jig on the final day to slow down and catch the schooling fish that had grown wary due to the fishing pressure.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

13 | CODY**MEYER**

by Tyler Brinks

32LBS, **2**OZ

Tactics

Like many others in the field, Meyer struggled to find schools of bass offshore. He instead looked to Google Earth to find productive areas.

"I found six creeks near Limestone Creek in the Decatur area that went way back. They had running water coming into them and were much cooler," says Meyer, adding that the main-lake water temperature was 85 to 90 degrees, but it was only 75 degrees in his creeks. "I went back into one in practice, and there were fish of all species swimming around everywhere. It was just full of life."

Each of the creeks had plenty of laydowns, stumps and current to fish.

"They were shallow, but the bass in the creeks were aggressive," Meyer adds. "I just ran out of fish because the areas didn't replenish."

Baits

Meyer's most effective bait was a 1/4-ounce Strike King buzzbait fished across 1 to 2 feet of water. A gizzard shad-colored Strike King KVD 1.5 square-bill also proved to be key. He made repeated casts with the crankbait to the ends of deeper laydowns to catch suspended fish.

Finally, Meyer used his finesse-fishing chops to catch cruising bass and to fish swift current.

"I would throw a weightless green pumpkin Strike King Ocho on a wacky rig or a green pumpkin Fat Baby Finesse Worm on a drop-shot to catch some of the fish I saw. Four of the fish I weighed in during the event came this way," he says.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

14 | DARREL**ROBERTSON**

by Curtis Niedermier

30LBS

Tactics

Robertson employed a two-pattern approach at the Cup. First was targeting the ends of a pair of bluff banks up the Elk River, which produced the bulk of his catch. One bluff in particular produced seven keepers for him the first day, and he caught them by fishing and re-fishing a 50-yard stretch where the bluff leveled out in its transition from steep wall to flat bank. The transition area dropped from about 8 feet deep down to 3 feet.

His other productive pattern was to stop and hit any good-looking cover along the riverbanks on his way back to Ditto Landing for weigh-in.

Baits

One bait keyed Robertson's entire tournament: a 5 1/2-inch green pumpkin Yamamoto Swim Senko rigged Texas style with a 1/8-ounce weight.

"I'd just flip it up to the bank and let it swim down the bluff," he says.

Around laydowns and other shallow cover, Robertson flipped the swimbait with a flippin' stick just like any other Texas rig.

"If I could find some fish, it would catch them. I just didn't get around enough fish," Robertson adds.

15 | DAVID DUDLEY

by Sean Ostruszka

29LBS, **14**OZ

Tactics

When the deep pattern never materialized in practice, Dudley fell back on a shallow pattern that he literally saw during pre-practice.

"During pre-practice I pulled into the backs of a few creeks and saw bass swimming around," says Dudley. "In practice I never hit any of the areas I ended up fishing during the tournament."

Dudley says there was only one key element in common among the creeks he fished: There were no other anglers fishing them. He says he fished his way as far back as he could go without getting his boat stuck.

Baits

As per his usual, Dudley did a bit of junk-fishing with three lures.

He fished isolated targets with a 5-inch green pumpkin wacky worm on a 2/0 hook.

Around flats and grass he tossed a 1/4-ounce white buzzbait with a pearl soft-plastic toad as a trailer.

On any deeper banks, he relied on a Livingston Lures crankbait in citrus shad.

PHOTO BY FLW MARSHAL

PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

16 | SHANE LEHEW

by Curtis Niedermier

29LBS, **13**OZ

Tactics

LeHew says he was never really dialed in at the Cup.

"I was just junk-fishing," he says. "Practice was not very good, but I like junk-fishing."

His primary approach was to fish laydowns and other shallow cover in a 200-yard-long stretch in the back of Anderson Creek off the Elk River. Heavy rains the day before the tournament had muddied the water some and lowered the water temperature about 13 degrees, which hurt the bite. Still, he caught quality keepers there on day one and landed 20 to 30 small keepers on day two when the fish were schooling under a tree.

LeHew's second tactic was swimming a jig around riprap near Decatur. On the third day, he was able to fish a couple of main-lake schooling spots that were previously occupied, and caught fish off two barges near one of the gas docks when he stopped to refuel.

Baits

An E.R. Lures jig with a Bizz Baits Bizz Bug trailer was a key bait combo for LeHew.

"I was trying to key on bigger fish with that bulky jig and flipping trailer, but I caught a ton of 12- to 13-inch fish instead," he says.

He added a Yo-Zuri 3DB Pencil topwater to catch the shallow schoolers in Anderson, but for the main-lake schoolers and the barges, LeHew cast a small Keitech Easy Shiner on a 1/16-ounce head to mimic small shad in the area.

His final lure was a Shane's Baits in-line buzzbait with a Bizz Baits Pad Daddy trailer.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

17 | JT KENNEY

by Colin Moore

29LBS, **5**OZ

Tactics

It took Kenney all of a day to admit to himself that he was wrong about where the Cup would be won.

"Most people expected that the fish would be deep – myself included," admits the Florida pro. "The up and down of my tournament was not being as open-minded as I should have been."

Kenney spent practice and pre-practice searching for the deep bite and started the tournament out deep, but he was disabused of that notion on day one, when he weighed in a single fish that totaled 1-11. That evening, he stowed all his offshore gear and got out his shallow-water "confidence" baits and tackle. He returned to a creek near Guntersville Dam and caught the biggest limit of the tournament – 19-2 – fishing shady banks for bass gorging on shad. It boosted him from 48th to 18th place.

Hoping to repeat the following day, Kenney returned to the creek, but most of the fish he caught were small keepers.

Baits

Kenney alternated among a Nichols Pulsator Spinnerbait (JT's chartreuse shad), a 6th Sense Movement 80X crankbait, and a 4-inch Gambler Flipp'n Tube with a 5/16-ounce Reins tungsten weight and 4/0 Trokar hook. Kenney's line for all baits was 18-pound-test Sunline Sniper fluorocarbon.

18 | BILL CHAPMAN

by Colin Moore

29LBS, **3**OZ

Tactics

The West Virginia pro originally intended to fish up the Elk River about 65 miles from the launch site at Ditto Landing, but on the third day of practice, he located fish not far from the ramp.

"My game plan was to hit those closer fish first and then – depending on how I did – make the long run to the Elk River," says Chapman.

Turns out that he didn't have to burn much gas after all. By 10 o'clock on the first morning of the tournament, he had a limit and decided to stay in the area.

"I was up in the [Tennessee] river in water that was about 6 feet deep or less," recalls Chapman. "Mainly it was very rocky, with some grass. There was also a stump where, at different times, I caught seven keepers."

Baits

Chapman mainly fished a 3 1/2-inch green pumpkin Cabin Creek Baits tube rigged with a 1/4-ounce jighead inside the bait. The head was equipped with a weedguard, and Chapman fished the tube on 8-pound-test Seaguar fluorocarbon. Otherwise, he used a bone-colored Heddon Zara Spook fished on 15-pound-test monofilament.

"I needed the weedguard with the tube because of all the junk where I was fishing. I would have to break off every cast otherwise," he says. "I'd just cast upriver into the current and let it wash the tube down across the rocks."

PHOTO BY FLW MARSHAL

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19 | BRANDON McMILLAN

by Colin Moore

25LBS, **12**OZ

Tactics

"Really, I didn't have a whole lot to lean on when it started," confesses McMillan of his Cup debut. In fact, what he did find was a small cove off the main lake that had been gouged out by a discharge pipe. It was like a community center for passing shad that, in turn, collected hungry bass.

Though McMillan only counted on catching one or two keepers from the spot, which was roughly 30 feet wide by 50 feet long and 3 1/2 to 4 feet deep, it proved to be much more productive. On the first morning of the tournament, it took him about 30 minutes to catch a limit that weighed almost 15 pounds. Afternoon thunderstorms had filled the cove with floating pine straw, leaves and other debris, and McMillan decided a frog was the best lure choice.

"I went back Friday," he says. "The fish were still there, busting shad, but they had started to wise up, and I just couldn't get many of them to cooperate."

McMillan was shy of a limit on Friday and dropped from second to 20th in the standings. In round three, he started at the same spot, had one bite during a timespan of about an hour and then left.

Baits

The Florida pro employed a SPRO Bronzeye Frog (killer gill) to catch the bulk of his fish. Otherwise, he fished a Zoom crankbait, a Zoom flipping tube (black and blue) and a 4x4 jig. On day three, he switched to a drop-shot rig baited with a Zoom Z-Drop Worm (green pumpkin).

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

20 | RAY HANSELMAN

by Sean Ostruszka

24LBS

Tactics

Two patterns emerged for the Texas pro prior to the tournament.

First, he figured out he could usually junk-fish a small limit in the morning around industrial areas near Decatur.

Once he had a limit, Hanselman would run to one of two lily pad fields to cull up.

One pad field he shared with the likes of Brad Knight and Andy Morgan. The other, which he located using satellite images online, he had to himself all three days and was where he caught the majority of his weight until storms on day three killed his shallow bite.

On day two, Hanselman was able to make the cut thanks to a midday mayfly hatch that opened up a brief pattern window.

Baits

A Strike King Rage Twin Tail Menace Grub did much of the work for Hanselman. He used a glacier-colored Menace Grub on a 4/0, 3/16-ounce belly weighted hook, swimming it around to catch a limit in the industrial areas.

He threw the Menace Grub around some in the lily pads, too, but in those areas he relied more on a Strike King Sexy Frog in a green pumpkin/pearl belly color. ■

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THE DEAL AT WHEELER

Things you might not have known about the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup at Wheeler Lake

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT PACE

$39,145,197.31

Total combined career earnings by the 50 pros who qualified for the Forrest Wood Cup, which includes their earnings at the Cup.

TOP 20 PATTERNS

ENDS OF CREEKS EXCLUSIVELY — 35%

- John Cox
- Jacob Wheeler
- Brandon Cobb
- Todd Auten
- Cody Meyer
- David Dudley
- JT Kenney

MULTIPLE SHALLOW PATTERNS — 30%

- Ray Hanselman
- Mark Rose
- Darrel Robertson
- Shane LeHew
- Bryan Thrift
- Brandon McMillan

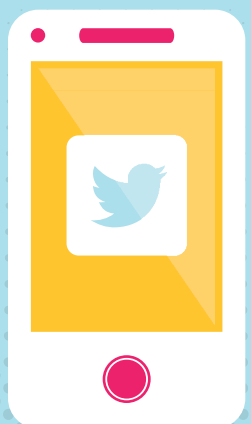
SCHOOLING FISH — 30%

- Chris Johnston
- Jeremy Lawyer
- Joseph Webster
- Michael Neal
- Jimmy Reese
- Scott Martin

OTHER — 5%

- Bill Chapman

PRO TWEETS



Todd Hollowell @toddhollowell — Follow

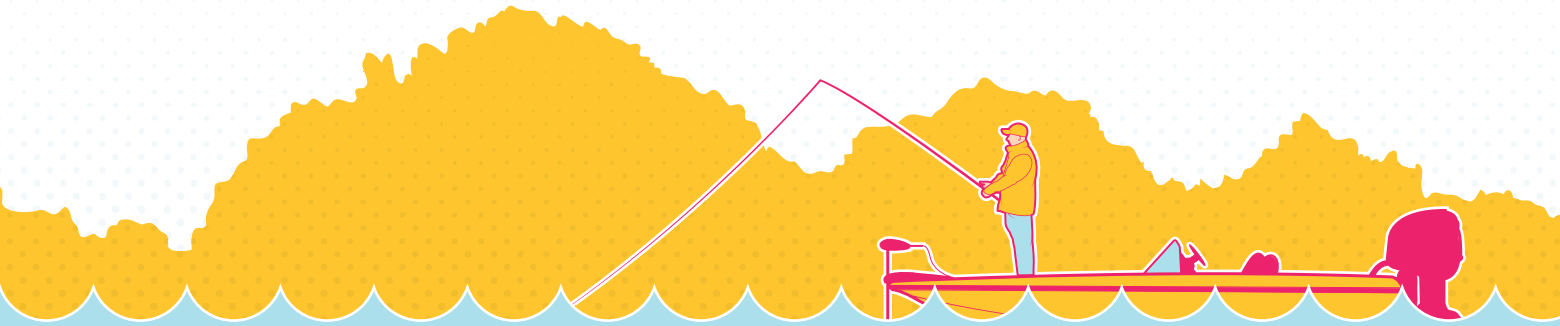
Congratulations to @johncox_fishing for taking home $300,000 and the Forrest Wood Cup! Well earned!

Stephen Browning @browningfish — Follow

Congrats to the "Tin Man", John Cox, on his @FLWFishing Cup Victory. Might not ever wipe that smile off his face!

TEAM CANADA

Three Canadians qualified to fish the 2016 Cup. The list includes brothers Chris and Cory Johnston plus Jeff "Gussy" Gustafson. That's the most ever.



BLUEGILL IMITATOR

- ✓ Bluegill
- ✓ Black

John Cox's primary bait was a Jackall Iobee Frog in either the bluegill pattern or black.

19 NEWBIES

The Cup featured 19 first-timers. Five of them made the top-20 cut:

- Jeremy Lawyer 5th
- Chris Johnston 8th
- Joseph Webster 10th
- Brandon McMillan 19th
- Ray Hanselman 20th

JOHN COX'S BLISTERING BIENNIUM

Florida pro John Cox has strung together quite the successful tournament run over the last two seasons, culminating in his 2016 Forrest Wood Cup victory. Here's the breakdown of his accomplishments.

2015 AND 2016

14 EVENTS

- TOP 20 → x8
- TOP 10 → x5

AOY 2015	AOY 2016	2 TOURNAMENT VICTORIES
TOP 10	TOP 10	HARTWELL, WHEELER

$530,904 — Total tournament earnings, which is $390,000 more than all of his previous seasons combined.

A PRINCE ONCE AGAIN

The last time a frog was used to win the Forrest Wood Cup was in 2008, when California pro Michael Bennett used a Snag Proof Bobby's Perfect Frog in the Fred's frog color to target the intersection of shade lines cast by docks and shallow bank grass at Lake Murray.

NEWS & NOTES

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF THE 2016 FORREST WOOD CUP

by Colin Moore

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

LYNCH FEELS AT HOME WITH CUP CROWD

The 2016 Forrest Wood Cup provided just the sort of laid-back atmosphere that country music star Dustin Lynch enjoys. Lynch, who posed with a few dozen fans prior to his performance for the weigh-in audience Sunday, was reared just up the road from Huntsville in Tullahoma, Tenn.

Lynch told a reporter that if he hadn't pursued a career in music, he probably would be involved in the hunting and fishing industry.

The concert was presented by WDRM – 102.1 FM Country.

SEEN&HEARD

"Fish it right, and a swimbait is like the antelope that breaks off from the herd when the lions get after them. He's the one that they're going to go after." – Byron Velvick, in his Expo seminar on swimbaits.

CALIFORNIA PRO WINS RANGER BOAT GIVEAWAY

Billy Hines of Vacaville, Calif., travelled a long way to reach the Forrest Wood Cup in Huntsville, Ala., but it was well worth the trip for the Costa FLW Series Western Division pro.

Hines' name was drawn for the Ranger Z521C powered by a 250-hp Mercury giveaway. The boat giveaway, which was sponsored by WAFF 48, involved the thousands of fans who visited the three-day FLW Expo in Huntsville's Von Braun Center and completed a form with their names and contact information. The drawing took place after the final weigh-in on Sunday, Aug. 7. As always, the Expo was open free to the public.

PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH

KELLEY WINS SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

Arkansas pro Cody Kelley was the recipient of the annual Forrest L. Wood Sportsmanship and Community Leadership Award and received the trophy from the award's namesake himself on stage prior to Saturday's Forrest Wood Cup weigh-in.

Kelley and his family have been involved with Special Olympics Arkansas for a number of years, and more recently he and his wife, Savannah, and mother, Judith Allen, teamed up with the FLW Foundation to conduct a series of youth fishing tournaments at various FLW events.

During the Forrest Wood Cup, the Kelley clan – with the help of Tour anglers Tom Redington, Nicole Jacobs and Logan Thomas, and 18 members of the Bullitt East High School fishing team from Mount Washington, Ky. – conducted a Kids Unified Fishing Derby at a park lake in Huntsville. Forty-four children signed up to fish the 1 1/2-hour event, which was won by 3-year-old Jamison Chappell of Valley, Ala. Ryle Waggoner, 5, of Carthage, Mo., was runner-up.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

A LUCKY LURE COMES THROUGH FOR COX

It wasn't lucky before he fished it in the Forrest Wood Cup, but John Cox certainly considers the River2Sea Whopper Plopper he used to add a few keepers to his winning stringer a lucky lure now.

For the most part, Cox fished with a Jackall Iobee Frog, Yamamoto Senko and buzzbait, but added the Whopper Plopper that his girlfriend, Stephanie Hutchinson, "gave him" to coax a few fish into hitting.

"She had it [the Whopper Plopper] in her tackle box when we went fishing for peacock bass in south Florida, and they really went for it," recalls Cox. "So I borrowed it to take to Wheeler. Turns out largemouths like it too, but most of the places I fished were too nasty for a topwater bait [with treble hooks]."

"I'm staying with Chris and Cory Johnston, my fellow Canadians, and Brandon McMillan, a wannabe Canadian. It's great. We're gonna go spend winter with him in Florida, and he can come up to escape the heat in summer." – Jeff "Gussy" Gustafson at the day two weigh-in.

PARKER A CROWD FAVORITE

For a guy who never fished an FLW event, Hank Parker is nevertheless popular with the FLW crowd. As a frequent guest speaker and master of ceremonies at the Forrest Wood Cup, the North Carolina native always lends a touch of homespun class to the event with his observations on tournament fishing in general and promoting fishing among youth in particular. Judging from the lines of fans waiting to get his autograph at the FLW Expo, and the applause he received when addressing the packed audience at weigh-ins, Parker was again a hit at the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup.

Incidentally, Parker's given name is Charles Bruce Parker. Early in his youth, Parker was a terror on a bicycle, and his father took to calling him "Handlebar Hank" after a television cartoon character that Parker enjoyed watching. The name stuck, though it was shortened to "Hank."

Years later, Parker became a terror of a different sort in a Ranger, much to the dismay of his competitors.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

A CHARITY CHAMPION RECOGNIZED

Shirley Crain, the only female Tour pro these days, received special recognition at the Cup for her contributions to the Children's Miracle Network (CMN) and the Arkansas Children's Hospital.

As the honorary chairman of the 2016 Will Fish for Kids-Bill Kerr Memorial Charity Tournament, the Arkansas pro helped raise $204,000 for the CMN and the hospital. The charity tournament takes place each year after the FLW Tour event on Beaver Lake, and typically several pros participate as members of sponsor teams.

BRAUER PURSUES ELUSIVE GOAL

Nobody has ever won all of the Big Four titles of tournament fishing: the Forrest Wood Cup, FLW Angler of the Year, the Bassmaster Classic and B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year. Texas pro Denny Brauer has won three of the four titles, including the Bassmaster Classic, B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year and FLW Angler of the Year. The one major prize that has eluded him so far is the Forrest Wood Cup championship.

Brauer qualified for this year's Cup through the 2015 Costa FLW Series Championship and hoped to make a run at the title. It wasn't to be, however, as he finished 38th in the standings. Turns out he isn't the only Walmart FLW Tour pro who has a crack at achieving tournament fishing's last great milestone. North Carolina veteran David Fritts also has won three of the four titles, including the Bassmaster Classic in 1993 and B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year in 1994. Where he differs from Brauer is that he has won the Forrest Wood Cup (1997), but has never captured the FLW AOY title.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

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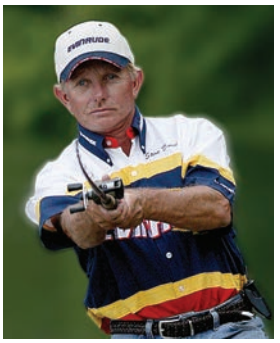
FOUR AND COUNTING FOR FLORIDA PROS

Question of the day: Anglers from which state have accounted for the most wins in the Forrest Wood Cup?

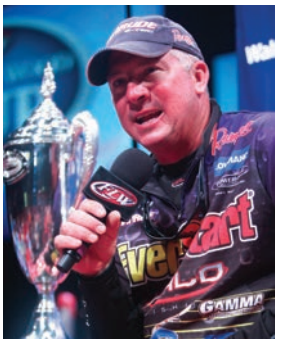
The answer is Florida, whose fishermen have taken home four Cups over the years. The Sunshine State dominance started with Steve Daniel in 1996 and includes Scott Martin in 2011, Randall Tharp in 2013 and John Cox in 2016. Granted, Tharp (an Alabama transplant) wasn't originally from Florida, but he was living there at the time of his Cup win.

No other state comes close to matching Florida in the count. South Carolina, Missouri and Arkansas have two apiece.

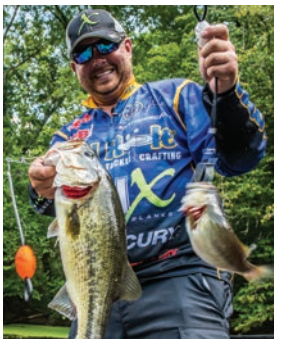


Steve Daniel

Scott Martin



Randall Tharp



John Cox

SEEN & HEARD

"They always say you can't win 'em all. I guess that's true." – Ray Hanselman at the day three weigh-in. Hanselman won all three Texas Division tournaments in the 2015 Costa FLW Series and then won the championship. He finished 20th in the Cup.

PHOTO BY FLW

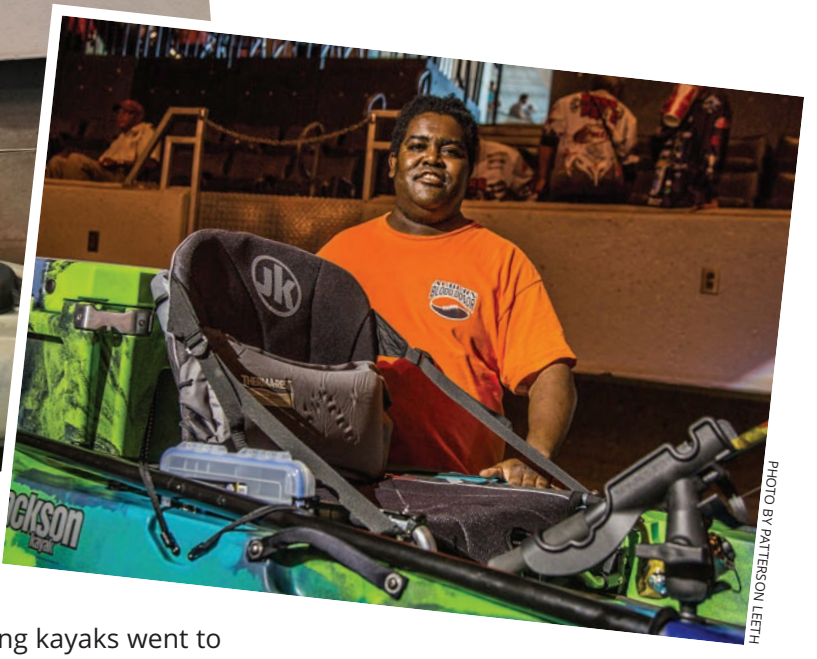


PHOTO BY PATTERSON LEETH

JACKSON KAYAKS GO TO ALABAMA WINNERS

Two of Jackson Kayak's best-selling fishing kayaks went to lucky winners of drawings sponsored by AL.com and Quaker State. Visitors to the free Expo could fill out forms in the show's front lobby to be eligible.

Joshua White, of Heflin, Ala., shown above left with Jackson Kayaks founder Eric Jackson, won one of the kayaks while Johnte Richardson, above right, won the other.

SEEN & HEARD

"I've waited a long time to be here. But I waited for the right time. The right time for my family. I've got my two oldest out of the house, and my 15-year-old, Sheldon, is here with me." – California pro Jimmy Reese at the day three weigh-in.

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MINN KOTA

STATE-FISH ART CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Nasa Xu of Katy, Texas, was announced as the winner of the annual State-Fish Art Contest at the Forrest Wood Cup. The high school senior's artwork of a largemouth bass was selected as the best rendition of a state fish among more than 5,000 entries.

Other finalists included Sarah Clayton of Ohio (grades 10-12), Electra Lowe of Tennessee (grades 10-12), Lydia Yan of Michigan (grades 7-9), Thomas Kim of California (first place, grades 7-9), Jacqueline Huang of Florida (grades 7-9), Jennifer Zhao of New York (grades 4-6), Michelle Zhao of California (grades 4-6), Jasmine Sun of Massachusetts (first place, grades 4-6), Meaghan Li of Florida (grades K-3) Kate Cropper of Illinois (grades K-3) and Jasmine Wang of Massachusetts (first place, grades K-3).

Joe Colby of Condon, Ore., was selected as the Educator of the Year. Since the program began, Colby's students have entered the contest every year. Colby won a $500 gift certificate for art supplies from Triarco, one of the program's major sponsors.

"The quality of entries this year was nothing short of spectacular," says Karen Hollingsworth, program manager. "Also, the essays that accompanied the artwork were great. We had a lot more international entries this year, from Asia, Europe, South America and Africa in particular, which is pretty cool, too."

Sponsors of Wildlife Forever's State-Fish Art Contest include FLW, Triarco, Rapala, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission – among others.

For more information, visit statefishart.org.

PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

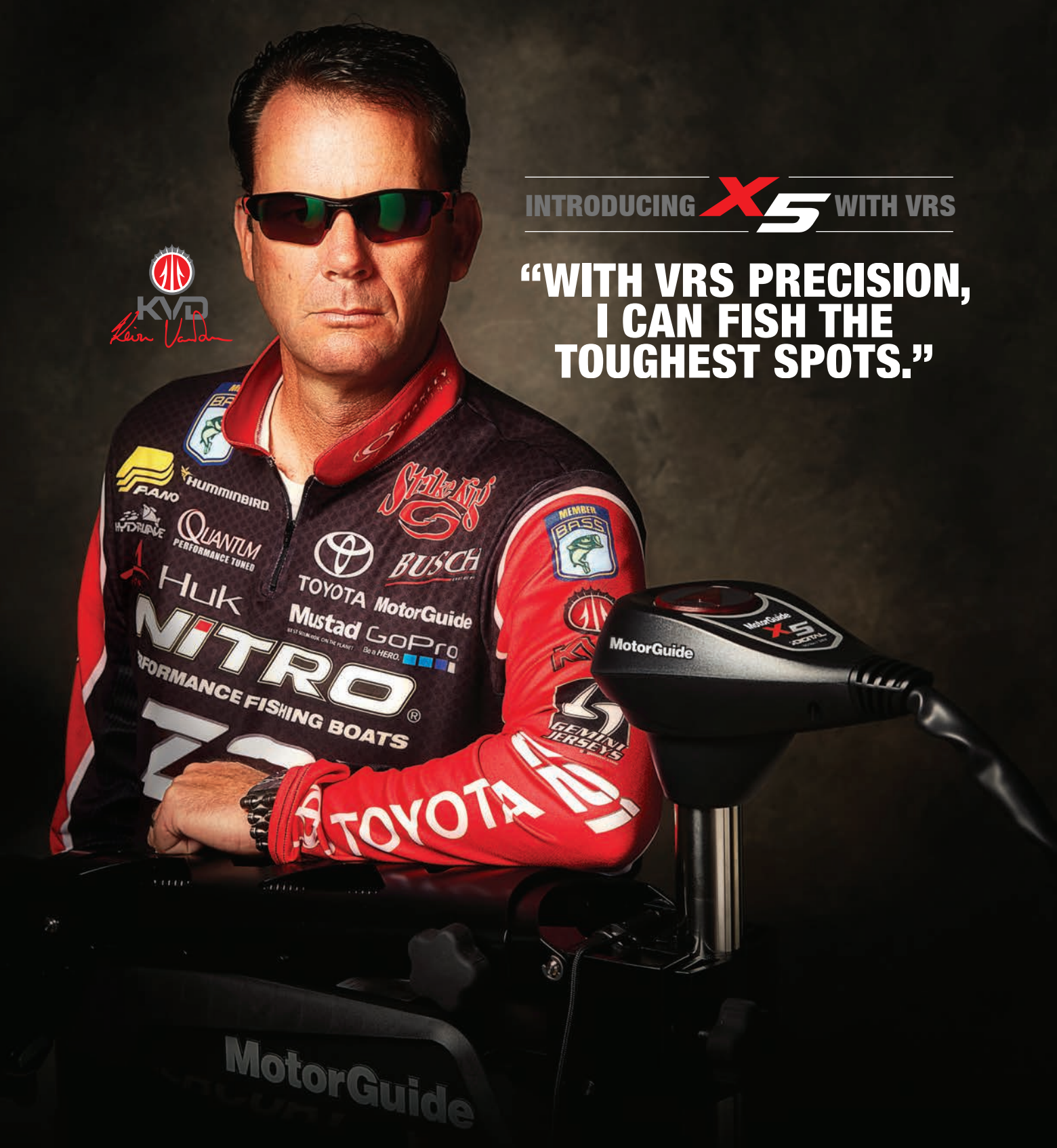
Vinutha Madala of Maryland was proud of her rendition of Hawaii's state fish. She even had the reef triggerfish reprinted on her T-shirt, and its Hawaiian name: Humuhumunukunukuapua'a.

PHOTO BY GARRICK DIXON

IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

Fisher Davis of Mount Ida, Ark., emerged as the winner of The Bass Federation's Junior World Championship, which ran concurrently with the Cup on Lake Guntersville. Thirty-seven junior anglers represented their respective states in the event, with six finalists fishing in the final round. Davis (Central Division) wound up with a limit that totaled 12-15, while Scott Sledge (Northern Division) of Greenwood, Ind., was runner-up with 11-3. Other finalists included Jacob Ferrell (Mid-Atlantic Division) of Vernon Hill, Va., with 7-14; Cameron Rhodes (Eastern Division) of Warwick, R.I., with 5-6; Kyler McKie (Southern Division) of North Augusta, S.C., with 3-5; and Isaiah Rios (Western Division) of Phoenix with 2-15.

Davis might be following in his father's footsteps. His dad, Mark Davis, is a Bassmaster Elite Series pro and was the first angler to ever win an Angler of the Year title as well as a Bassmaster Classic championship in the same season. The elder Davis accomplished that feat in 1995.



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EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE ANOTHER JIMMY HOUSTON

Veteran pro Jimmy Houston got a surprise prior to the Cup's final weigh-in. He was greeted by a stadium full of fans wearing blond wigs reminiscent of the Oklahoma angler's trademark blond mop. The Houston aspirants even had sunglasses that matched their hero's. The promotion was organized by Quaker State in recognition of Houston's 50th anniversary as a tournament fisherman. He started competing in Oklahoma tournaments when he was still a schoolboy.

Houston was pleased by all the recognition, but couldn't pass up a chance for a wisecrack aimed at spectators wearing the wigs.

"It looks like a roomful of Donald Trumps," he joked.

PHOTO BY COLIN MOORE

SEEN&HEARD

"Somebody help me hitch up one of these Rangers. I'm taking it home." – Country music singer Dustin Lynch, who performed for the standing-room-only crowd Sunday prior to the final weigh-in.

FLW CANADA PUTS IN AN APPEARANCE

Cory Banford, director of operations for FLW Canada, was in attendance at the Forrest Wood Cup, and, who knows, next year he might be there more in an official capacity when the championship takes place at Lake Murray.

Since Canada joined FLW's International Division along with China, South Korea and Mexico, Banford's bunch has staged its qualifying tournaments and is set to designate two of its teams as competitors in the Costa FLW Series Championship on Table Rock Lake in early November. The top two pros from the International Division there will advance to the 2017 Cup.

PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEDON

BIG BUCKS FOR RANGER CUP WINNERS

The pre-Cup banquet for anglers and their families was also payday for the 2016 Ranger Cup winners, starting with Chris Johnston of Canada, who was the top finisher. Johnston got a fully equipped Ranger Z518C with an Evinrude outboard. Other winners, in order of their Ranger Cup finishes, included Hoosier pro Jacob Wheeler (2nd, $10,000), Scott Martin (3rd, $8,000), Mark Rose (4th, $7,000) and Shinichi Fukae (5th, $5,000). Martin and Scott Canterbury also earned an extra $25,000 apiece for winning at Lake Champlain and Beaver Lake, respectively.

Ranger Boats Promotions Manager Scott Arms (left) made the check presentations and noted that anglers earned $155,000 in Ranger Cup bonuses in 2016, and the program has paid out more than $17 million in its existence. ■

A FEW NEW ITEMS TO ADD TO YOUR BUCKET LIST

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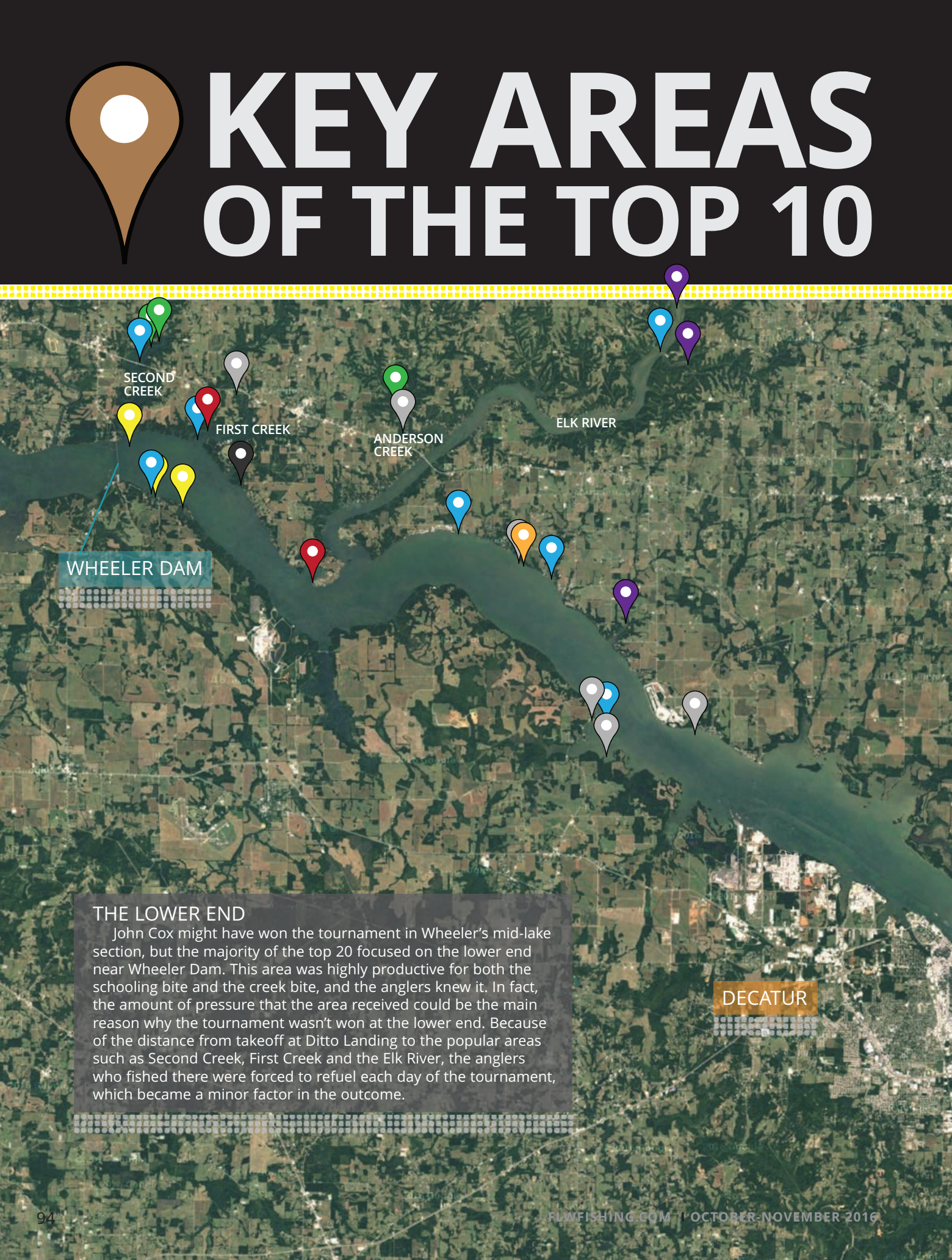
KEY AREAS OF THE TOP 10



THE LOWER END

John Cox might have won the tournament in Wheeler's mid-lake section, but the majority of the top 20 focused on the lower end near Wheeler Dam. This area was highly productive for both the schooling bite and the creek bite, and the anglers knew it. In fact, the amount of pressure that the area received could be the main reason why the tournament wasn't won at the lower end. Because of the distance from takeoff at Ditto Landing to the popular areas such as Second Creek, First Creek and the Elk River, the anglers who fished there were forced to refuel each day of the tournament, which became a minor factor in the outcome.

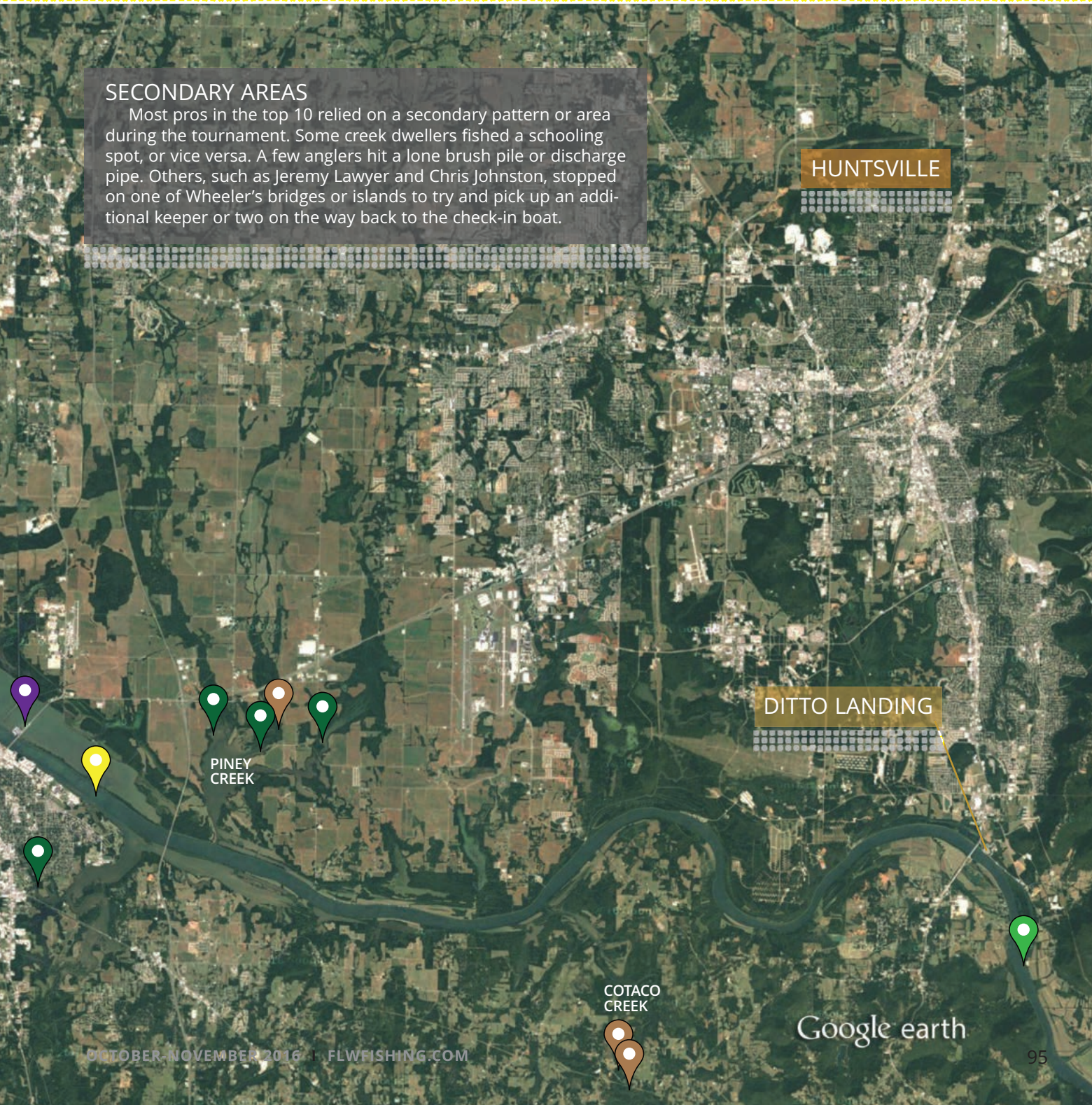
Where the Forrest Wood Cup's top performers caught their fish at Wheeler Lake

John Cox | Todd Auten | Jeremy Lawyer | Jacob Wheeler | Brandon Cobb

Michael Neal | Bryan Thrift | Mark Rose | Chris Johnston | Joseph Webster

SECONDARY AREAS

Most pros in the top 10 relied on a secondary pattern or area during the tournament. Some creek dwellers fished a schooling spot, or vice versa. A few anglers hit a lone brush pile or discharge pipe. Others, such as Jeremy Lawyer and Chris Johnston, stopped on one of Wheeler's bridges or islands to try and pick up an additional keeper or two on the way back to the check-in boat.



TOP 10 TACKLE

From the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup

1. Cox: Jackall Iobee Frog; **2a.** Neal: Lucky Craft Sammy 115; **2b.** Neal: Lucky Craft Gunfish 95; **2c.** Neal: 6-inch Big Bite Baits Finesse Worm (Carolina rigged); **3a.** Auten: LIVETARGET Hollow Body Frog; **3b.** Auten: 1/2-ounce Z-Man Chatterbait with Zoom UV Speed Craw; **3c.** Auten: 1/2-ounce Zorro Baits Booza Bug with Zoom Super Chunk; **3d.** Auten: Zoom Super Fluke; **4a.** Thrift: Damiki D Pop 70; **4b.** Thrift: Damiki Mamba Jig; **5a.** Lawyer: 4-inch Keitech Easy Shiner with 1/4-ounce swimbait head; **5b.** Lawyer: Reaction Innovations Smallie Sweet Beaver; **5c.** Lawyer: Homemade 1/2-ounce, 1 1/2-inch-long jigging spoon; **5d.** Lawyer: LIVETARGET BaitBall Series Threadfin Shad TDD-70 ; **5e.** Lawyer: Yellow Magic popper custom-painted by Fall Creek Lures in "Forrest Wood Cup shad"

6a. Rose: 8-inch Strike King Bull Worm; **6b.** Rose: 6 1/2-inch Strike King Finesse Worm; **7a.** Wheeler: Accent Game Changer buzzbait with Zoom Horny Toad; **7b.** Wheeler: Terminator Popping Frog; **7c.** Wheeler: SPRO Bronzeye Frog 65; **7d.** Wheeler: 9/16-ounce E.R. Lures jig with Gene Larew Punch Out Craw; **8.** Johnston: Evergreen SB105 pencil Popper; **9a.** Cobb: DUEL HARDCORE XX Crank 1+; **9b.** Cobb: 1/2-ounce Greenfish Tackle Skipping Jig with Zoom Super Chunk; **9c.** Cobb: Zoom Baby Brush Hog; **10a.** Webster: Lucky Craft Sammy 100; **10b.** Webster: Norman Lures DD22; **10c.** Webster: 6-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm

PRO PERSPECTIVE

TOM REDINGTON

"Put simply, winning the Cup is a life-changing moment."

In sports, the best player or team doesn't always win, and fans love to cheer for an underdog. For instance, watching a group of no-name players from a small school dethrone the Goliaths of college basketball in the NCAA tournament completely captivates the nation.

While Cinderella makes for a great story, winning the Forrest Wood Cup is a major career milestone, and as such, none of the pros wants to see it won by a fluke victory. Not only does the $300,000 prize mean financial security for years, but winning a Cup places an angler in the annals of history, instantly becoming one of the stars of the sport. With notoriety comes greatly enhanced sponsor support, which is the lifeblood of a sustained fishing career.

On the flip side, professional fishing is a costly sport, and careers of dozens of extremely talented anglers have been cut short due to financial problems. For an up-and-comer such as Jacob Wheeler in 2012, a Cup win establishes a career. And for a top pro such as Scott Martin in 2011, it moves him from the category of established pro to one of the all-time greats. Put simply, winning the Cup is a life-changing moment.

This year, the top 10 finishers all had compelling storylines, and any would have been a very deserving winner who would have embodied a true champion.

John Cox, the eventual winner, was always scraping by to get enough funds to fish the Tour, leading him to famously fish from his aluminum boats. Now he's universally known as a shallow-water ace, and financial worries are a thing of the past. *The line to sponsor John Cox forms to the left. Please take a number.*

Runner-up Michael Neal is well-regarded as a ledge fisherman, but the fifth-year pro catches them on all lakes. A Cup win for Neal would have taken him from rising star to the "top pro" echelon.

Todd Auten, who finished third, is as consistent as they come. Fellow competitors very well respect him, but he's one of those blue-collar guys who isn't a household name. A Cup win would have instantly changed that, bringing long overdue recognition for a top angler.

Bryan Thrift (fourth) and Mark Rose (sixth) are two of the biggest names on Tour, with $4,000,000 in earnings and 14 wins between them. Thrift is an Angler of the Year with four top fives and eight top 10s at the Cup, while Rose has made the top 10 four times now. A Cup win is very likely in each of their futures, and will be a resume builder for each to stake a position as one of the best anglers to ever fish the Tour.

For Jeremy Lawyer (fifth) and Joseph Webster (10th), winning the Cup would have given either one a solid foothold for a career as a bass pro. Neither would have been a fluke win, either. Lawyer ran the gauntlet of numerous local and regional events to place second in the FLW Bass Fishing League All-American in 2015, then qualified again and won the All-American in 2016. Similarly, Webster overcame long odds to win a berth as the 2016 The Bass Federation champion.

Wheeler burst on the scene by winning the All American in 2011 and the Cup in 2012. He finished seventh this time. A win would have cemented his place in history as the only two-time Cup winner. Like Wheeler, rising stars Chris Johnston (eighth) and Brandon Cobb (ninth) could have launched to stardom with a Cup win, too. Johnston finished second in the FLW Tour AOY race as a rookie this year, while Cobb now has two top-10 finishes at the Cup through only three seasons on Tour.

One kicker bite on a hot and muggy Alabama Sunday changed the life of John Cox forever. For the nine other talented anglers and their fans, there is only a lifetime of contemplating what could have been. ■

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FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

ON TOUR

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 2016 COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW
- ONEIDA, 1000 ISLANDS WRAP UP NORTHERN DIVISION
- MEET MEXICO'S INTERNATIONAL DIVISION QUALIFIERS

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

2016 COSTA FLW SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

TABLE ROCK LAKE

BRANSON, MO. – NOV. 3-5

Hosted by ExploreBranson.com

by Jody White

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANSON CVB

Returning to Branson, Mo., for the first time since 2008, the 2016 Costa FLW Series Championship will find a fitting playing field on Table Rock Lake Nov. 3-5. It's a history-making tournament this season, with anglers from the International Division competing for the first time and, when all is said and done, 11 contestants qualifying for the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup.

The Layout

Impounded in the 1950s primarily for flood control, Table Rock is a sprawling Ozark reservoir that might be described as "Beaver Lake on steroids," according to Walmart FLW Tour pro Greg Bohannan. As such, it has no grass, but nevertheless a lot of habitat variety. With clear water in the main lake and dirtier water up the rivers (particularly in the James River), anglers will find almost anything that suits them.

There's offshore timber, deep ledges, plenty of docks, rocks, bluffs, and miles of pockets and creeks. Shad is the primary forage species, but there are also plenty of bluegills and crawfish.

Patterns in Play

On a lake as diverse as Table Rock, there are plenty of patterns that anglers can use to their advantage. Weather-wise, the one constant is that the windier it is, the better the fish will bite. Here are some patterns to watch at "the Rock" when summer tips over into fall:

Deep timber – Deep timber could still be in play, with bait and bass hanging out around trees as deep as 40 feet or more. The caveat is that suspended bass are tricky to catch, and it's a pattern that takes some dedication and expertise to pay off. Swimbaits, blade baits, umbrella rigs, drop-shots, spoons and big Texas-rigged worms all can work.

Offshore structure – The other summer holdover pattern is more standard as bass are likely to get on deep drops in the summer and stay on them well into the fall. The best places to catch bass that are deep and not suspended are located up the rivers. There, the water is a bit more stained and the breaks tend to be shallower, making it a bit easier for anglers to pinpoint and catch bass on them. When David Curtis won

The Bassfecta

Like other Ozark lakes, Table Rock is home to smallmouth, largemouth and spotted bass. Unlike some of the other lakes in the region, however, Table Rock offers a legitimate chance to see a 3-pound specimen of any of those species weighed in. Though targeting jumbo smallmouths specifically is likely to be difficult, if not unwise, they can bulk up a bag in a hurry at Table Rock. And Bohannan says it'd be a mistake to count out the potential of spotted bass to carry pros into the top 10.

Watching the Weather

In October, the average high air temperature is 70 degrees in Branson, but come November that average high drops to 56 degrees. Depending on how the autumn weather shakes out come the first week of November, the bass could be in any number of phases.

If the weather stays warm, the best bet might be to find some schools that are still hanging around offshore. With lower temperatures, beating the banks for fish that have pulled up for the fall feed is a viable option.

The main thing for competitors to keep in mind is that just because the calendar has made the change of seasons, it doesn't mean all the bass have as well. In the 2008 Costa FLW Series Championship held at the same time on Table Rock, Bohannan caught fish shallow for second place, and David Curtis earned the win by targeting an offshore school on a river ledge.

Lake Vitals

Area: 43,100 acres
Shoreline: 745 miles
Impounded River: White River

the Costa title on Table Rock with this pattern in '08, he relied on a football jig and a deep-diving crankbait.

Topwaters – Late summer and most of fall are prime time for a topwater. As more and more bass push up shallow to join the big ones that are already roaming there, the topwater bite should get correspondingly better. For years, buzzbaits and buzz frogs have been the deal in the Ozarks, and while that's still the case, the River2Sea Whopper Plopper is possibly the hottest lure in the region now. Running the banks is standard procedure, and there's a realistic chance that the Series Championship could be won on a topwater. Everything depends on the weather.

Who Made the Field

• The top 40 boaters and top 40 co-anglers in the season standings in each of the five U.S. Divisions – Northern, Western, Central, Southeastern and Southwestern – if they fished all three regular-season events in their qualifying division.
• Two boaters and two co-anglers from each of four International Division nations – China, Mexico, South Korea and Canada – will also compete. ■

COSTA FLW SERIES

1000 ISLANDS

CLAYTON, N.Y. – JULY 21-23

Hosted by the Clayton Chamber of Commerce

PRESENTED BY MERCURY OFFICIAL ENGINE

WINNING ANGLER

SCOTT DOBSON
CLARKSTON, MICH.

by Kyle Wood
PHOTOS BY GARRICK DIXON

Stat Line: Dobson has a long history of top 10s in FLW Bass Fishing League, Walmart FLW Tour and Costa FLW Series competition, including six wins at the BFL level. This victory is his first at the FLW Series level. He's now earned more than $425,000 with FLW.

Tactics and Target Areas

Fluctuating water temperatures and odd weather left the 1000 Islands smallmouths in a bit of a funk. Some were reluctant to head out to deep water where they "should be" this time of year, and others had a serious case of lockjaw.

Dobson exploited fish still cruising shallow and relating to clean spots on the bottom on flats in 12 feet of water or less. He called the spots "blue diamonds" due to their bluish hue in the gin-clear water. It's a pattern he knows well from his home waters of Lake St. Clair and found it to be easily duplicated around Wolfe Island, which is located at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River near Lake Ontario. The abundance of moss covering the bottom forced fish to load up around the cleaner rock areas, making them ripe for the taking.

"If you got any of that slimy grass on your lures, it was over and the fish weren't going to bite," Dobson says. "We started to call it 'snot' because when that happens your bait is not getting bit. So I keyed in on a couple of isolated areas that were clean and snot-free."

Dobson eased his way around the flat until he got close to a clean spot, dropped his shallow-water anchor and cast at fish he saw cruising. He boated about 80 percent of his total catch by sight-fishing.

CONDITIONS

Fishery Type: St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario
Air Temperature: mid-80s
Water Temperature: upper 60s to low 70s
Wind: stout west winds on day one, building stronger on day two; calmer on day three
Precipitation/Cloud Cover: mostly clear to partly cloudy skies
Moon Phase: waning gibbous
Water Clarity: 15 to 20 feet
Predominant Lake Features: boulders, islands, grass and large flats

Keys to Victory

No doubt, being able to piece together a pattern that was easy to replicate was a huge plus for Dobson. He was the only angler to bring in more than 21 pounds each day, making fishing seem easy compared to the rest of the field.

A lot of the field overlooked the shallow fish, writing them off due to water temperature and the amount of moss on the rocks. Dobson leaned on his strengths as a sight-fisherman, but not for bedding bass – for bass lurking the shallows looking for an easy meal.

"I think the biggest key to my win was my eyes," Dobson explains. "I saw almost every fish that I caught, and my experience fishing shallow back home on Lake St. Clair taught me that bait presentation is everything. If you cast too close, you'll spook them. If you cast too far away, they can't see it. It had to be very precise to get them to bite."

The other big factor for him on a the vast body of water that connects the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario was having the right equipment. The wind forced the hand of a lot of the anglers – and forced tournament directors to limit the field to the river on day two – but Dobson was running a rig designed to handle big water thanks to Bryan Doyle, his buddy and co-angler practice partner for the event, who lent his boat to Dobson.

"I can't thank Bryan enough for loaning me his Ranger 620 Fisherman," Dobson adds. "It is rigged to handle rough water, and it made a big difference."

Dobson won the tournament with a variety of baits, but a drop-shot rigged with a 1/4-, 3/8- or 1/2-ounce weight (depending on the conditions) helped pluck smallmouths from the shallows. He paired it with one of three soft baits: a Berkley PowerBait Twitchtail Minnow, Gulp! Fry Worm or Gulp! Minnow.

PRESENTATION KEYS

Keeping the bait in one place was vital for getting cruising smallmouths to eat – especially when fishing a drop-shot. Varying his weights from 1/4- to 1/2-ounce helped to keep the rig on the key spots depending on the amount of current and wind.

"Getting the bait on a clean spot and keeping it there without blowing off was very important," adds Dobson. "I'd hold the boat in place, cast in and just dead-stick it. Once the fish saw the bait they would just swim over and eat it."

The drop-shot scored the majority of his big bites, but the ultra-finesse Ned rig also pulled through later in the event. Because of how small and subtle the Ned rig is, bigger fish that were more lethargic and wary had no issue with snatching up that easy meal.

As the tournament wore on he fished more of the areas between clean spots, and that is when he worked in a Megabass Vision 110+1 and Duo Realis Spinbait 90. Even if fish wouldn't commit to those baits they would still show themselves, giving Dobson a chance to pitch a drop-shot or Ned rig at them.

CO-ANGLER CHAMP

JOE THOMPSON
CLAYTON, GA.
Total Weight: 43-07 (15 fish)
Winning Program: Thompson's prowess with a drop-shot earned him the win at 1000 Islands with three bags of smallmouths. The Georgia angler kept it simple with a 1/4-ounce weight for his drop-shot and a Berkley PowerBait Twitchtail Minnow as his only bait. ■

TOP FIVE

1. SCOTT DOBSON
CLARKSTON, MICH.
Total Weight: 68-08 (15 fish)
Winnings: $82,899

2. CHRIS JOHNSTON
PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO
Total Weight: 61-04 (15 fish)
Winnings: $14,609

3. CAL CLIMPSON
SHARON, ONTARIO
Total Weight: 58-08 (15 fish)
Winnings: $11,684

4. CORY JOHNSTON
CAVAN, ONTARIO
Total Weight: 58-06 (15 fish)
Winnings: $9,425

5. BOB IZUMI
MILTON, ONTARIO
Total Weight: 54-11 (15 fish)
Winnings: $8,482

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

ONEIDA LAKE

BREWERTON, N.Y. – AUG 18-20

PRESENTED BY Ranger BOATS

COSTA FLW SERIES

WINNING ANGLER

CORY JOHNSTON
CAVAN, ONTARIO

Stat Line: Johnston earned his second Northern Division win in two years and clinched his third Northern Division Angler of the Year title at Oneida.

by Jody White

Tactics and Target Areas

Anglers arrived at Oneida for the final stop of the Costa FLW Series Northern Division to find some truly unusual conditions, with the usually cooperative smallmouths a little battered by fishing pressure and sullen because of a recent heat wave. The mixed-up bass made for a mixed-up top 10, and pros caught fish shallow and deep, and on topwater, umbrella rigs and dragging. A few even mixed in some largemouths. When it all settled, Cory Johnston's shallow-centric plan triumphed easily by more than 4 pounds.

After catching a few good ones shallow on the first of six practice days, Johnston pretty well stayed dialed in on his eventual game plan the whole time.

"There was a section of the lake that I didn't even go and fish, just because when you look at it on the GPS it doesn't have the stuff I was looking for," says Johnston. "I put my trolling motor on 100 and just went looking [in practice]. There were days when I went offshore, but as soon as I got off the deeper pattern and went back to what I was doing I knew I was on the right program because I started catching and seeing fish again."

He fished predominantly along the south and west sections of the lake, targeting shallow variations for his bass. Anything from a rock pile, patch of sand, dock or grass clump was fair game, and the experienced Canadian pro sight-fished for the majority of his weight on each of the first two days. Big winds complicated matters and forced him to adapt on the final day.

"I wanted to fish shallow like I'd been doing the first two days," says Johnston, "but the wind was up, and I couldn't do it. The waves had a lot of my stuff up shallow real dirty. So I went to some of my secondary stuff that was

TOP FIVE

1. CORY JOHNSTON
CAVAN, ONTARIO
Total Weight: 50-04 (15 fish)
Winnings: $77,778

2. CASEY SMITH
MACEDON, N.Y.
Total Weight: 46-01 (15 fish)
Winnings: $12,724

3. IAN RENFREW
PHOENIX, N.Y.
Total Weight: 44-14 (14 fish)
Winnings: $9,774

4. CHRIS JOHNSTON
PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO
Total Weight: 44-12 (15 fish)
Winnings: $8,145

5. LAWRENCE MAZUR
EAST AURORA, N.Y.
Total Weight: 44-03 (14 fish)
Winnings: $7,330

sheltered and wasn't too close to shallow water so it wasn't stained from the wind. Most of the time I was fishing very specific stuff, and the rest of the time I was fishing a break with an umbrella rig."

Besides the added umbrella rig on the final day, Johnston also fished a DUO Realis Spinbait 80 (ghost pearl) and put a few in the boat on a Rapala X-Rap Pop that he fished at a few spots and in and around his juicer areas to grab some bonus bass on days one and two.

Keys to Victory

One key to victory was Johnston's ability to add a kicker largemouth off a dock each of the first two days. Though he caught smallmouths off the docks too, Johnston was one of the only pros to really weigh in big fish of both species each of the first two days.

The other key was simply his expertise at fishing shallow. This year on the Walmart FLW Tour, the Johnston brothers – Cory and his brother, Chris – proved to be masters of the shallow game, especially when they would see the bass, and that bore out in a big way on Oneida.

"Where we grew up there are a lot of local lakes with a lot of shallow fishing," says Cory. "But it never used to be clean water. As the zebra mussels began to get in the lakes the water really cleaned up, and you had to be able to catch them. Also, on places like Lake Simcoe and the Great Lakes, the water is so clear that you pretty well have to sight-fish them. So it was just a process of growing up and learning the little tricks of how to do it.

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

A DUO Realis Spinbait 80 was Johnston's primary tool, but he also used a drop-shot, Yamamoto Senko and Rapala X-Rap Pop.

PRESENTATION KEYS

Having found his fish usually in water 4 feet deep or less, Johnston cleaned up on the first two days, tying for second on the first day with 17 pounds, 6 ounces and taking a commanding lead on the second day with 18-13. The key for Johnston was catching pressured, spooky bass at a high rate, and that started with his dozens of waypoints on specific pieces of cover. Knowing where to look ahead of time gave him an advantage over the bass and let him creep up and make precise presentations.

"It was just a matter of sneaking up on them and seeing them far enough out so you could finesse them and they wouldn't spook," says Johnston. "The key was not letting them see your bait fall. If they saw your bait fall they would spook every time. But if you would overshoot them and drag your bait to the fish they would eat it every time."

Once he sneaked up, he tossed a DUO Realis Spinbait or any of a handful of little soft plastics to tempt his fish.

CO-ANGLER CHAMP

CHRISTOPHER HALL
SOUTH ABINGTON TOWNSHIP, PA.
Total Weight: 46-00 (15 fish)
Winning Program: Hall says he caught most of his fish through the event on a Lucky Craft Sammy (ayu), a melon-colored tube on a 3/8-ounce Texas rig, a Lucky Craft Pointer 78, a drop-shot rig and an umbrella rig. For Hall, the keys were fishing smaller-than-normal baits and going against the grain of what his pro was doing.

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

CONDITIONS

Fishery Type: shallow natural lake with smallmouths and largemouths
Air Temperature: mid-60s to upper 80s
Water Temperature: upper 70s to low 80s
Wind: light and variable in the mornings on days one and two with a light west wind in the afternoon; east at 20 mph on day three with 1- to 3-foot waves
Moon Phase: waning full
Water Clarity: 4 to 5 feet of visibility with less on windblown banks
Predominant Lake Features: Oneida is a shallow Northern lake with lots of vegetation and scattered rocky shoals. ■

MEET MEXICO'S CHAMPIONS

FOUR INTERNATIONAL DIVISION ANGLERS PUNCH TICKETS TO TABLE ROCK

by Jaime Luengo,
President of FLW Mexico

FLW Mexico's two teams that qualified to fish as part of the International Division at the Costa FLW Series Championship on Table Rock Lake Nov. 3-5 know they have their work cut out for them and have been preparing diligently for the big test.

Chema Rosillo (pro) and Eduardo Silvestre (co-angler) compose one team, having finished as the points champions in the two FLW Mexico events held in this, the circuit's first season.

Jose Mario Granados (left) and Jose Juan Ortiz.

Chema Rosillo (left) and Eduardo Silvestre.

The other team consists of Jose Juan Ortiz (pro) and Jose Mario Granados (co-angler).

Indeed, the qualifiers dominated the competition in the two tournaments, with Ortiz and Granados having won at Lake Zimapan and Rosillo and Silvestre finishing first at Lake La Lajilla and third at Zimapan.

Looking Ahead

Just as in any tournament, excitement takes over, and the adrenaline that accompanies victory makes every fisherman react differently. Some will shed a few tears, others will laugh nervously and just a very few will show no emotion outwardly, though being joyful inside. In the inaugural year of FLW Mexico, it was the same. The anglers who won or did well in the two tournaments were understandably elated and eager to experience what the future will bring.

"First of all, I would like to sincerely thank FLW for including Mexico under its umbrella of international partners," says Rosillo. "And all the FLW Mexico staff did a tremendous job putting together these important events in our country. I'm sure this program is going to be a true success story in the years to come for everybody."

He also adds that he is looking forward to competing in the Costa FLW Series Championship.

"Representing Mexico is a huge responsibility, and we know that we are going to compete against some of the best anglers of the world," says Rosillo. "We know that this is no small chore. Preparing ourselves is extremely important to performing in a manner that reflects well on all our fishing countrymen, who are excellent fishermen in their own right."

The Pressure's On

Rosillo has been looking over all the information he can find about Table Rock and trying to form a mental picture about what to expect from the lake. In many respects, it is similar to some lakes in Mexico.

Likewise, Silvestre agrees that staying focused is the first order of business. This soft-spoken teenager, who is in his senior year of high school, is preparing himself academically to become a lawyer, but his golden dream is to fish as a pro on the FLW Tour some day.

"I'm learning all I can by fishing with great fishermen like Chema [Rosillo]," says Silvestre, whose fishing classroom is Lake Guerrero, a lake many anglers from the United States are familiar with.

Ortiz and Granados also appreciate the opportunity presented to them. The two fishermen from the Celaya Bass Fishing Club are keen to perform as true champions at the Costa FLW Series Championship and put Mexico on a higher competitive level in the eyes of other contestants.

"We have a huge responsibility to our country. Representing Mexico in any type of competition is always an honor and must be taken seriously," says Ortiz, or "JJ," as he is more commonly known.

In the same way, Granados complements his partner's thoughts.

"We don't want to disappoint our families and friends," he says. "So we will prepare ourselves accordingly. If any of our two boaters make it to the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup as representatives of the International Division, it's the same as all of us winning."

Meeting the Challenge

One thing that the two teams have in common is their ability to adapt to demanding fisheries. The Zimapan tournament serves as an example. The water was falling when the competition began, and the fish were stationed around newly created humps, sunken islands and elongated points in 8 to 10 feet of water.

While soft plastics and crankbaits were the norm, the top teams experimented with various finesse rigs and 4-inch Yamamoto Senkos rigged wacky style or Texas-rigged, and even caught fish on 3/16- and 1/4-ounce spinnerbaits. Ortiz and Granados won with a limit that totaled 28 pounds, 12 ounces, while Rosillo and Silvestre had 27-8.

True, Zimapan isn't Table Rock, but some of the same conditions that the Mexican champions confronted are likely to be repeated to some degree at Table Rock.

Can Ortiz and Granados, Rosillo and Silvestre follow up on their winning ways in the Costa FLW Series Championship? Only time will tell. All they pledge is that they will do their best, with no expectations other than to meet fellow anglers who share their love of tournament competition and to make new friends. ■

MISSISSIPPI RIVER, PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, WIS. – JULY 9

UW-PLATTEVILLE WINS CENTRAL CONFERENCE FINALE

by Dominick Schenewerk

The Mississippi River at Prairie du Chien was the site of the 2016 FLW College Fishing Central Conference season finale, where 85 teams competed to qualify for the 2017 FLW College Fishing National Championship. Despite the risks and time loss associated with locking from one pool to the next, many teams chose to make the gamble. For the University of Wisconsin-Platteville team of Colby Peterson and Aaron Gohla, the gamble paid off, and the Pioneers earned the victory with a five-bass limit weighing 14 pounds, 8 ounces.

"We had to lock up to Pool No. 9, and with the way barge traffic works, we were not really certain when the lock would let us through [on the way back]," says Gohla, a senior majoring in mechanical engineering. "We did not want to risk it and not be able to get back to weigh-in on time, so we had to lock back through at 11 a.m."

The pair scoured a 300-yard stretch and caught fish consistently every few minutes within two passes between 8:30 and 10 a.m. Of these relatively rapid catches, eight of the fish were keepers, and the team culled only once.

Gohla threw a Texas-rigged black and blue Yamamoto Senko with a 1/4-ounce weight, while Peterson threw a black and blue Berkley Havoc Pit Boss. Their biggest catch of the day came on Peterson's Pit Boss.

The UW-Platteville team fished one other spot in Pool 9 with no luck before locking back into Pool 10, where takeoff was held, and fishing the rest of the day without catching any fish big enough to allow them to cull. However, their limit held up at the scale, and Gohla and Peterson left the tournament with a win, qualification for the 2017 National Championship and $2,000 in club scholarships.

"We held our own out there, but never expected to win," says Peterson, a senior majoring in industrial technology management. "We're two of our club's oldest members, so I guess it was our turn." ■

CHAUTAUQUA LAKE, CHAUTAUQUA, N.Y. – JULY 23

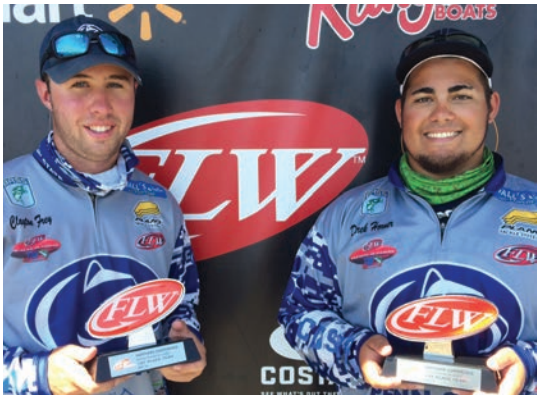
PENN STATE DEAD-STICKS DOCKS FOR NORTHERN VICTORY

by Dominick Schenewerk

To close out the 2016 FLW College Fishing Northern Conference season, 64 college teams tackled Chautauqua Lake in hopes of sacking up enough weight to advance them to the 2017 FLW College Fishing National Championship. To win it, the Penn State University team of Clayton Frey and Derek Horner fished more than 100 docks in a prime area of the lake to haul in five bass weighing 13 pounds, 3 ounces.

"I had a pretty decent plan, and it was to hit Bemus Bay first, then hit some docks on the south side of the lake," says Horner, a junior majoring in rehabilitation and human services. "Early in the morning we caught a couple in Bemus, and then I caught one good one about an hour into the tournament, and then another 2-pounder.

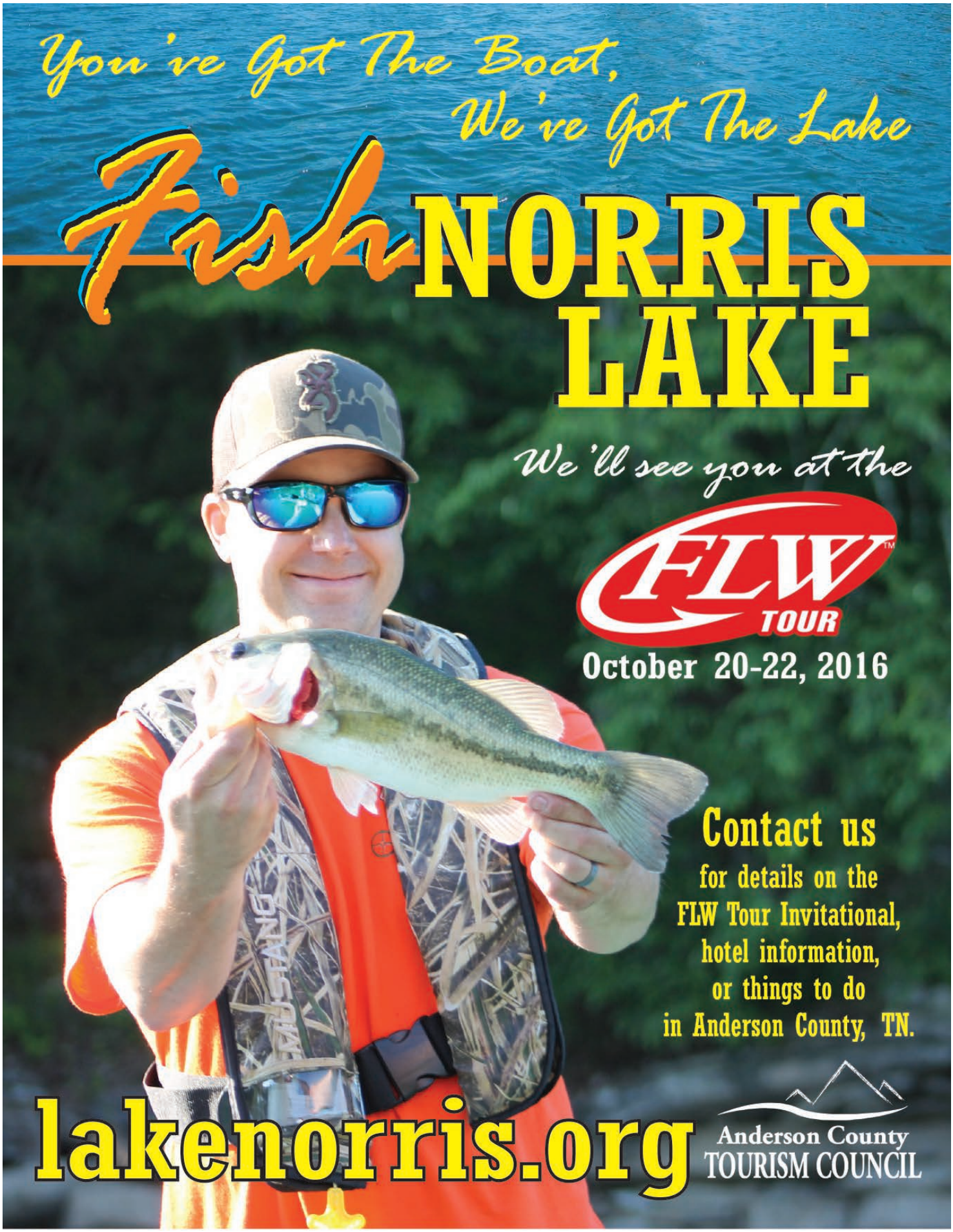
"When we got to the docks down south, the fish just weren't there," he continues. "We spent probably too much time there trying to make them bite when they weren't there, so my game plan was always to come back and hit Bemus because the fish always seem to reload up there."



Horner and Frey booked it back to Bemus to search out the rest of their limit using a cinnamon brown-colored Yamamoto Senko as their primary lure and a green pumpkin JaKKed Baits football-head jig rigged with a green pumpkin Strike King Rage Craw as a backup.

"We didn't really pick apart any docks with the Senko when we returned unless we had caught fish on them previously," adds Frey, a junior wildlife and fisheries science major. "It was more just moving through them and getting a couple of casts to them. We would just cast the Senko and let it sink to the bottom. You really didn't have to work it much."

After a heartbreaking experience for Horner when a 5-pounder broke him off on a dock, the team recovered with 10 minutes before weigh-in and landed its final keeper. That last fish earned the club the victory, $2,000 and a slot at the championship. ■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FLW BASS FISHING LEAGUE TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Division	Arkie
Event Location	Lake Dardanelle
Date	7/9
Winning Angler	Zack Freeman
Hometown	Russellville, Ark.
Winning Pattern	Targeted bass suspended in 6 to 8 feet of water on a main-lake ledge
Winning Lures	Custom green pumpkin and purple football jig and a Carolina-rigged green pumpkin Zoom Mag II Worm
Winning Weight	18-12
Winning Co-Angler	Rick Cole
Hometown	Hot Springs, Ark.
Winning Weight	16-14

Division	Buckeye
Event Location	Ohio River-Maysville
Date	7/16
Winning Angler	Jake Poffenberger
Hometown	Brookville, Ohio
Winning Pattern	Fished a series of flats near creek mouths
Winning Lures	1/8-ounce chartreuse Hawk Spinnerbait and watermelon red magic Yamamoto Senko
Winning Weight	9-07
Winning Co-Angler	Alex Redwine
Hometown	Cincinnati, Ohio
Winning Weight	5-14

Division	Choo Choo
Event Location	Lake Guntersville
Date	7/9
Winning Angler	Ryan Salzman
Hometown	Huntsville, Ala.
Winning Pattern	Concentrated on ledges that held baitfish
Winning Lures	True Bass true blue-colored Little Head 4.5 Swimbait
Winning Weight	24-5
Winning Co-Angler	Alex Spires
Hometown	Chickamauga, Ga.
Winning Weight	22-00

Division	Great Lakes
Event Location	Mississippi River-La Crosse
Date	7/23
Winning Anglers	Nick O'Keefe and Mark McCartney
Hometowns	La Crosse, Wis. (NO); Davis Junction, Ill. (MM)
Winning Patterns	Focused on flowing grass in light current in Pool No. 7 (NO); Fished lily pads (MM)
Winning Lures	Pearl blue-colored Lethal Weapon IV swim jig (NO); SPRO Bronzeye Pop frog and a custom white, yellow and violet-colored swim jig rigged with a 5-inch white pearl V&M swimbait (MM)
Winning Weight	11-00
Winning Co-Angler	Kyle Rabelhofer
Hometown	Silver Lake, Wis.
Winning Weight	11-02

Division	Great Lakes
Event Location	Mississippi River-Prairie du Chien
Date	8/20
Winning Angler	Mike Brueggen
Hometown	La Crosse, Wis.
Winning Pattern	Began in Pool No. 9 targeting weeds then moved to a shell bed
Winning Lures	Black and purple-colored Kureiji swim jig and Heddon Zara Spook
Winning Weight	15-11
Winning Co-Angler	Bradley Juen
Hometown	La Crosse, Wis.
Winning Weight	12-04

Division	Hoosier
Event Location	Ohio River-Rocky Point
Date	7/30
Winning Angler	Chris Wilkinson
Hometown	Farmersburg, Ind.
Winning Pattern	Focused on wood near current breaks
Winning Lures	Pearl chartreuse Jackall Super Eruption Spinnerbait and Jackall Cover Craw
Winning Weight	12-09
Winning Co-Angler	Joshua Jenkins
Hometown	Indianapolis, Ind.
Winning Weight	6-00

Division	Illini
Event Location	Ohio River-Golconda
Date	7/16
Winning Angler	Marty Sisk
Hometown	Evansville, Ind.
Winning Pattern	Fished multiple offshore bars and small ledges
Winning Lures	1-ounce blue glimmer Accent spinnerbait, Carolina-rigged green pumpkin Zoom Brush Hog and 3/4-ounce green pumpkin Hawgback Lures football-head jig
Winning Weight	17-13
Winning Co-Angler	Jeffrey Lee
Hometown	Olney, Ill.
Winning Weight	12-14

Division	Illini
Event Location	Rend Lake
Date	8/13
Winning Angler	Neil McCord
Hometown	West Frankfort, Ill.
Winning Pattern	Focused on rocks, ridges and laydowns
Winning Lures	Chartreuse Lucky Craft BDS Crankbait
Winning Weight	17-10
Winning Co-Angler	Chad Hill
Hometown	Marion, Ill.
Winning Weight	10-03

Division	LBL
Event Location	Kentucky/Barkley Lakes
Date	7/9
Winning Angler	Adam Ohms
Hometown	Edwardsville, Ill.
Winning Pattern	Fished ditches in the backs of creeks north of Paris Landing
Winning Lures	Black and blue 3/8-ounce Z-Man ChatterBait
Winning Weight	24-05
Winning Co-Angler	Brett Miller
Hometown	Fairdale, Ky.
Winning Weight	21-08

Division	Michigan
Event Location	Lake St. Clair
Date	7/16
Winning Angler	Kyle Greene
Hometown	Ortonville, Mich.
Winning Pattern	Targeted scattered weeds in 6 to 10 feet of water
Winning Lures	Fiesta melon-colored PROvider Performance Series Tube and natural-colored swimbait
Winning Weight	23-00
Winning Co-Angler	Jason Hayward
Hometown	Otsego, Mich.
Winning Weight	23-04

Division	Michigan
Event Location	Detroit River
Date	7/30
Winning Angler	Michael Sitko
Hometown	Pinckney, Mich.
Winning Pattern	Targeted isolated weed patches along a mid-lake stretch on Lake St. Clair
Winning Lures	Yamamoto Baits Shad Shape Worm on a drop-shot and a 4-inch green pumpkin Poor Boys Tube
Winning Weight	23-09
Winning Co-Angler	Jason Kopczyk
Hometown	Fenton, Mich.
Winning Weight	20-11

Division	Michigan
Event Location	Detroit River
Date	8/20
Winning Angler	Matt Elkins
Hometown	Spencerville, Ohio
Winning Pattern	Fished offshore on Lake Erie in 30 feet of water
Winning Lures	Purple passion-colored LBA Baits Ding Ding and smoke purple Jackall Crosstail Shad
Winning Weight	22-11
Winning Co-Angler	Brian Ruetz
Hometown	Toledo, Ohio
Winning Weight	18-05

Division	Music City
Event Location	Old Hickory Lake
Date	7/16
Winning Angler	Drew Boggs
Hometown	Lebanon, Tenn.
Winning Pattern	Pitched and flipped shallow cover in creeks
Winning Lures	Texas-rigged green pumpkin and tilapia Big Bite Baits Craw Tube
Winning Weight	13-10
Winning Co-Angler	Darryl Humphrey
Hometown	Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Winning Weight	11-01

Division	Northeast
Event Location	Oneida Lake
Date	7/9
Winning Angler	David Ehrentraut
Hometown	Locke, N.Y.
Winning Pattern	Fished grass edges
Winning Lures	Gold flash minnow-colored Keitech Swing Impact Swimbait and a drop-shot rigged with a Strike King KVD Dream Shot
Winning Weight	18-09
Winning Co-Angler	Bryan Cumbo
Hometown	West Wyoming, Pa.
Winning Weight	16-13

Division	Northeast
Event Location	Oneida Lake
Date	8/13
Winning Angler	Ed Casey
Hometown	Whiteford, Md.
Winning Pattern	Fished mussels and scattered grass on mid-lake shoals
Winning Lures	Drop-shot baby bass Jackall Crosstail Shad and dark melon goby-colored Strike King Coffee Tubes
Winning Weight	18-04
Winning Co-Angler	Daniel Hann II
Hometown	Williamson, N.Y.
Winning Weight	16-11

Division	Ozark
Event Location	Truman Lake
Date	7/16
Winning Angler	Matt Gunter
Hometown	Wheatland, Mo.
Winning Pattern	Flipped cedar trees and other types of wood
Winning Lures	Texas-rigged Zoom Ol' Monster Worm in plum and green pumpkin
Winning Weight	15-03
Winning Co-Angler	Derrick Tyree
Hometown	Owensville, Mo.
Winning Weight	10-05

Division	Piedmont
Event Location	High Rock Lake
Date	7/9
Winning Angler	James Blankenship
Hometown	Siler City, N.C.
Winning Pattern	Focused on shallow bushes and willow trees in a bay
Winning Lures	Two jigs rigged with a sapphire blue Zoom Super Chunk and black and blue Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw
Winning Weight	19-02
Winning Co-Angler	Landon Whicker
Hometown	Winston-Salem, N.C.
Winning Weight	14-00

Division	Piedmont
Event Location	James River
Date	7/30
Winning Angler	Randy Gillespie
Hometown	Sanford, N.C.
Winning Pattern	Flipped wood, rocks and laydowns in a creek
Winning Lures	Drop-shot green pumpkin Zoom Finesse Worm and green pumpkin Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver
Winning Weight	14-11
Winning Co-Angler	Victor Riveras
Hometown	Newport News, Va.
Winning Weight	18-05

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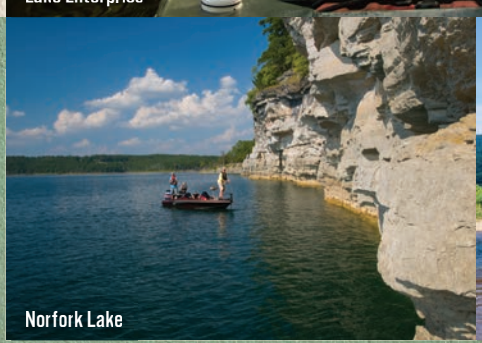
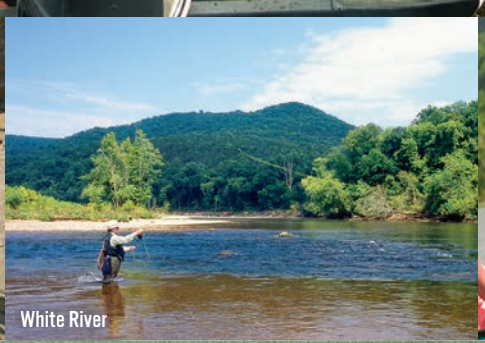


Norfork Lake



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TBF

by Dan Johnson

WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

PORTER, JENNINGS WIN 2016 HIGH SCHOOL FISHING WORLD FINALS

In one of the most exciting finishes in High School Fishing World Finals history, Peyton Porter and Coleton Jennings came from behind to win the most coveted crown in all of High School Fishing.

Porter and Jennings, representing Calloway and Marshall county high schools in western Kentucky, respectively, dedicated their quest for a title to former teammate Dalton Cooksey, who currently fishes the Walmart FLW Tour and was injured in a car accident shortly before the event.

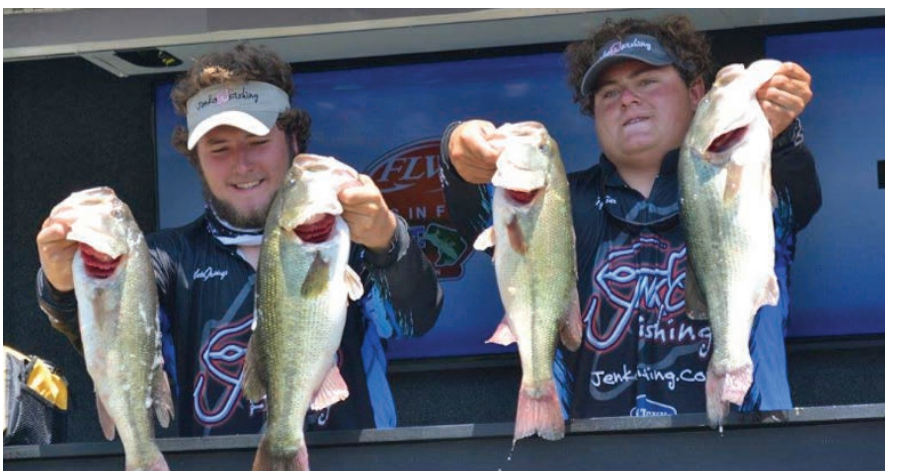
"We made it our goal to go out and win this for Dalton," says Jennings. "He is one of my best friends, and we are thrilled we were able to get it done."

Held June 29-July 2 on Pickwick Lake out of Florence, Ala., the championship was hosted by Florence/Lauderdale Tourism and drew hundreds of participants from 22 states. It was open to all students participating in the FLW/TBF High School Fishing program and is the largest open championship in the nation.

The entire field competed head-to-head days one and two, after which the top two teams from each state advanced to square off in the semi-final round, where weights were zeroed. All other teams battled in a consolation round.

The top 10 teams from the semi-finals and the next top 10 by weight – drawn from both the semi-finals and consolation round – moved forward to day four, when weights were again zeroed to give everyone a fresh start. In addition, a special last-chance drawing gave one lucky team a golden ticket to the finals.

The stakes were high at the no-entry-fee event, with thousands in scholarship dollars and additional prizes on the line. Bethel University in McKenzie, Tenn., offered a $48,000 four-year scholarship to the members of the winning team. Should the winners not be able to accept Bethel's offer, The Bass Federation offered up to $8,000 in scholarships.



Coleton Jennings and Peyton Porter caught an impressive 26-pound, 3-ounce limit on the final day of the HSF World Finals to take home the 2016 title at Pickwick Lake.

Plus, the event offered a long list of additional prizes to help young anglers along their journeys. Prizes included laptops, tablets, gift cards and large-screen TVs that would be the envy of any dorm room.

Porter and Jennings qualified for the final day by finishing second in the consolation round. They went out as boat No. 12 and made a long run to the far end of Pickwick Lake, where they threw a variety of baits to amass an impressive 26-3 limit. After weighing their catch at the McFarland Park stage, they nervously watched the remainder of the weigh-in from the hot seat.

The overflow crowd grew silent as the final team took the stage. Brothers Cole and Cort Walker of Tennessee's Hardin County High School led the first three days of the event and were determined not to let the title slip away. On day one, for example, they had set the bar high with a 26-7 limit. Their day four limit appeared equally impressive, and indeed would easily top the 20-pound mark. But when the scale settled at 23-6, the Walker brothers finished runner-up to Porter and Jennings.

The Top Five:

1. Peyton Porter and Coleton Jennings, Calloway County High School and Marshall County High School (Ky.) – 26-03
2. Cole Walker and Cort Walker, Hardin County High School (Tenn.) – 23-06
3. Luke Glasgow and Gavin Norris, Marion County High School (Ala.) – 20-14
4. Wesley Holt and Colby Miller, Oak Hill High School (La.) – 18-10
5. Isaac Duncan and Jack Kelly, North Pike High School (Miss.) – 18-07

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Evinrude's industry-leading E-TEC G2 technology is now available in midrange horsepowers.

The Bass Federation sponsor Evinrude makes the latest in high-performance power plants available to bass fans with midsized fishing platforms with the introduction of a lineup of 150- to 200-hp E-TEC G2 engines.

Building on the success of the 200-hp High Output (H.O.) to 300-hp models launched in 2014, the company developed the new E-TEC G2 150, 150 H.O., 175 and 200 engines.

Evinrude's revolutionary two-stroke G2 series is the result of five years of intense research and development following a mandate from parent company Bombardier Recreational Products, and offers serious bass anglers a host of benefits, including 75 percent fewer emissions, 15 percent better fuel economy and up to 30 percent more torque than leading four-stroke motors.

Along with blistering hole shots and more stable RPM, even in turns and troubled water, the engines offer lightning-fast response to throttle adjustments. Plus, features such as Dynamic Power Steering, i-Trim and a hydrodynamic SLX gear case yield effortless control in all conditions, without sacrificing speed or acceleration.

No required break-in period and push-button automatic winterization help make the E-TEC G2 one of the most dependable engines to own. It's covered by a five-year warranty (including corrosion), with no dealer-scheduled maintenance for five years or 500 hours.

For details or to design the perfect G2 for your brand of bass fishing, visit **evinrude.com**.

KLAUSEN CLAIMS TBF CENTRAL DIVISION TITLE

Pat Klausen of Lincoln, Neb., turned in a consistent performance to win the 2016 The Bass Federation Central Division Championship presented by Evinrude on Missouri's Truman Lake.

Held June 22-24 out of Bucksaw Marina, the event was hosted by the Greater Clinton Chamber of Commerce and Nebraska Bass Federation. It pitted 96 anglers from Arkansas, Nebraska, Louisiana, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi and Missouri against one another on the fabled fishery. Anglers battled for divisional honors and coveted berths in the 2017 TBF National Championship.

Klausen was the only competitor to sack three consecutive five-bass limits. He brought an impressive 13-pound, 2-ounce bag to the scale on day one to tie for third and stay within striking distance of leader Bill Hughan of Little Rock, Ark., who weighed 14-9.

Klausen moved up to first place with 11-8 on day two and held the lead with 10-10 on the final day for a 35-4 total weight. He reports catching his day one fish on jigs in 8 to 10 feet of water, then switching to swim jigs to catch suspended bass the last two days.

Arkansas' Doug Thompson of Mabelvale finished second with 31-10. In third place, Evan Barnes of Hot Springs, Ark., was the only other angler to break the 30-pound barrier with a 30-11 total.

By state, Arkansas paced the pack with 93 bass for 221-1, followed by Nebraska (95, 219-9), Louisiana (75, 173-5), Texas (71,171-1), Kansas (74, 170-8), Oklahoma (72, 165-0), Mississippi (65, 146-12) and Missouri (60, 137-13). In all, 605 bass weighing 1,405-1 crossed the scale.

The Central Division showdown was the third of seven traditional TBF Division Championships set for 2016. The top two anglers from each of the states competing in TBF Division Championships advance to the 2017 TBF National Championship next spring, along with qualifiers from the new TBF Semi-Finals program.

DAVIS WINS TBF JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Arkansas' Fisher Davis finished strong to win the 2016 The Bass Federation Junior World Championship Aug. 5-6 on Alabama's legendary Lake Guntersville.

Hosted by the City of Scottsboro and the Greater Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, the no-entry-fee championship pitted 11- to 15-year-old TBF Junior State Champions from 37 state Federations against one another to compete for top honors and more than $10,000 in prizes and scholarships.

Davis, of Mount Ida, claimed a $2,500 scholarship to the school of his choice, plus a $250 Cabela's gift card for his efforts.

On day one of the two-day event, which coincided with the Forrest Wood Cup held on nearby Wheeler Lake, the young competitors fished against anglers from their own TBF divisions for a chance to advance to the final round.

Undaunted by brutally warm weather, which saw the heat index soar to nearly 100 degrees, Davis topped his seven Central Division rivals with four bass weighing 10 pounds on day one.

Kyler McKie of North Augusta, S.C., and the Southern Division sacked the heaviest bag of the day with four fish weighing 13-2 to lead the day overall.

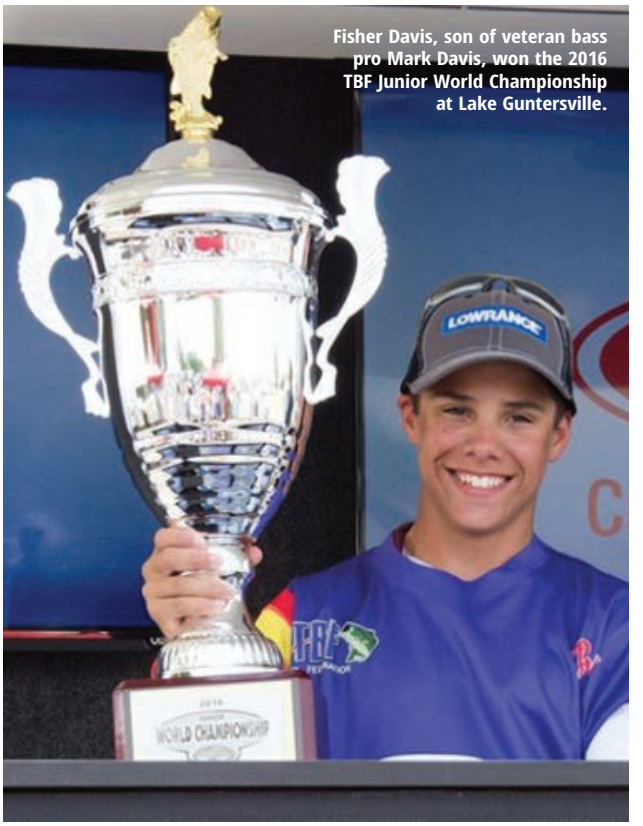
Arizona's Isaiah Rios of Phoenix led the Western Division with four bass for 11-4. Cameron Rhodes of Warwick, R.I., sacked a five-fish, 10-3 limit to capture the Eastern Division title, while Scott Sledge of Greenwood, Ind., claimed Northern Division honors with a five-fish, 9-10 bag.

Competitors representing the Mid-Atlantic Division struggled to land fish of legal proportions. As a result, the division title was settled by a tiebreaker that gives final-round qualification to the oldest angler, which was Jacob Ferrell of Vernon Hill, Va.

TBF zeroed the weights on Saturday, putting all six finalists in the hunt. As he had on day one, Davis relied on Texas rigging junebug-colored soft baits. Bites were few and far between, but the son of successful touring bass pro Mark Davis stuck to his guns. He knew patience and persistence were his best allies in the final battle on Guntersville.

"I was worried, real worried," says Fisher, "but I didn't change a thing."

The strategy paid off with six bites. Fisher converted all six, culling one bass and bringing the rest to the scale for a 12-15 total. Sledge also sacked a limit, but fell just short with 11-3 to finish second. Ferrell finished third with 7-14, followed by Rhodes with 5-06, McKie with 3-05 and Rios with 2-15.



Fisher Davis, son of veteran bass pro Mark Davis, won the 2016 TBF Junior World Championship at Lake Guntersville.

The finale capped a week of pre-fishing and other fun activities planned for the competitors and their families. Adding to the excitement, all participants had the opportunity to cross the FLW weigh-in stage prior to the start of the Forrest Wood Cup day three weigh-in.

TBF National Youth Director Mark Gintert credited local site hosts for making the championship a rousing success.

"We were excited to work with the City of Scottsboro and Greater Jackson County to provide a first-class experience for this group of state champion anglers," says Gintert, who announced his retirement from the national scene with TBF at the Junior World Championship.

For more details about the event, visit bassfederation.com, or call TBF national headquarters at 580.765.9031.

"I was worried, real worried, but I didn't change a thing."

— Fisher Davis

MICHIGAN TBF HOSTS LEGISLATIVE SPORTSMEN'S CAUCUS FISHING EVENT

On Monday, July 11, The Bass Federation of Michigan hosted state lawmakers, Department of Natural Resources staff and Michigan United Conservation Clubs representatives at its second annual Lake St. Clair bass fishing outing – dubbed the Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus Bass Fishing Event.

The event was designed to help legislators better appreciate the world-class fishery of St. Clair and its fertile yet fragile ecosystem, while giving bass tournament anglers a chance to meet policymakers and conservation officials.

Before the group hit the water, DNR fisheries biologist and bass tournament liaison Tom Goniea gave a short presentation at the Lake St. Clair Fisheries Research Station. He reported that nearly 2,000 bass tournaments had registered for 2016 on the Michigan Fishing Tournament Information System to date. Results from several hundred events had already also been entered to give the DNR a better understanding of the state's most popular bass destinations.

After the presentation, boater volunteers and guests were matched up and sent fishing on Lake St. Clair for three hours before returning for a luncheon hosted by TBF of Michigan.

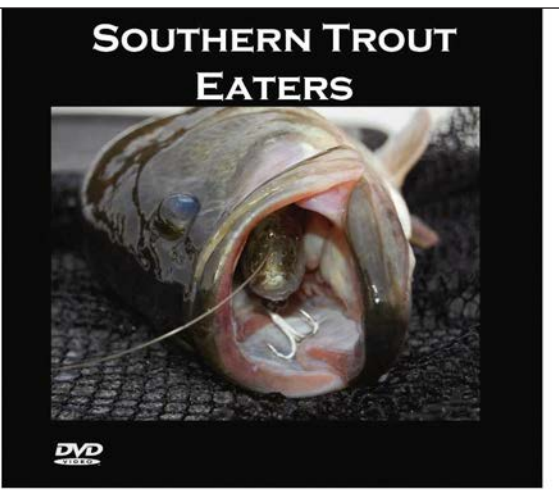
Sen. Ken Horn (left) shows off a nice smallmouth caught while fishing with boater volunteer Tommy Robinson.

Legislators in attendance are members of the Michigan Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, the largest bipartisan caucus in Michigan state government.

TBF of Michigan Conservation Director Dan Kimmel reports that both the fishing and presentations were well received by the lawmakers.

"Some participants landed their first-ever Great Lakes smallmouth bass, along with a number of other species," he says. "Legislators also appreciated the presentation and left with a deeper understanding of the impact bass tournaments have on Michigan's economy."

Kimmel thanked TBF volunteers, including TBF of Michigan President Dave Reault, for donating their time and covering all boating and luncheon expenses to ensure the event involved no cost to taxpayers. ■



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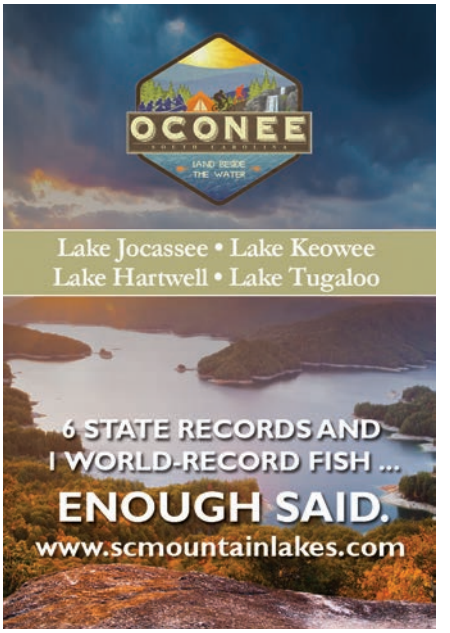

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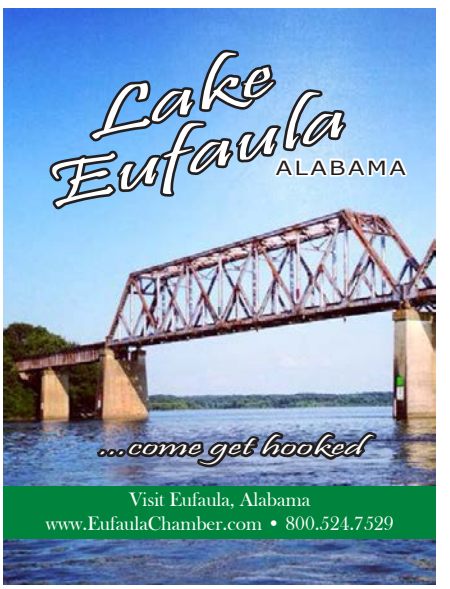

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row. The area was a 30- to 40-yard-long gravel bar where fish schooled all day. Instead of running around checking multiple spots, Neal simply Power-Poled down and waited for the fish to school around him. As crazy as sitting in one spot for four days sounds, the result was a runner-up finish for Neal.

Become the Shad

Many times Neal would stand idle without fishing and wait for fish to surface before even making a cast. He said the key to catching the schooling fish was to land the topwater right on the very spot where a fish was chasing a shad to the surface. Chris Johnston, who finished eighth chasing schoolers, said the same thing about his schooling pattern.

"It's like a schooling fish gets dialed in on one shad, and only wants to chase that shad until it gets it," Johnston says. "And the only chance you have to catch that fish is to land right on top of the fish while it's in hot pursuit, causing the fish to mistake your lure for the shad it was chasing. It's like you have to become that very shad the bass is chasing."

Feather Weather

Speaking of Neal and Johnston, both said putting a feather on the tail hook of their topwater walking baits was extremely critical. Both gave examples of fish that would just strike at the feather, providing them each a few extra fish per day. Neal said adding a feather was the difference in his catches on day one (10-2) and day two (15-12).

"I was not using a feather on my topwaters the first day," Neal says. "While waiting to blast off on day two, I sat down and put feathered hooks on my topwaters, and it seemed to make a big difference right off the bat the second day."

Bottom Was a Bust

One of the big surprises from Wheeler was the complete lack of a deep ledge bite. Two pros who put in an extensive amount of time looking for ledge fish were offshore ace Mark Rose and TBF champion Joseph Webster. Webster alone put in some 45 days of pre-practice, scouring Wheeler's deeper haunts. During the event, neither could connect with a solid ledge bite. In fact, Webster had to resort to schooling fish, and Rose went shallow with a buzzbait to score top 10s. Webster did catch some deep cranking fish on the first day, but his deep bite fizzled after that. Rose plucked a few keepers from deeper brush piles but could never dial in a solid ledge program, either. Similarly, many competitors mentioned not being able to get bit on the bottom because so many of Wheeler's fish were suspended.

Spoon Boon

When BFL All-American champion Jeremy Lawyer of Sarcoxie, Mo., revealed that several of his better bass during the event came on a 1/2-ounce hammered jigging spoon – helping him finish in fifth place – it raised some eyebrows.

Lawyer targeted schooling fish on the surface with a topwater popper, but when the fish went down, he wanted to trigger a reaction bite off the bottom – and that's where the spoon came into play. Lawyer would cast the spoon out, let it sink to the bottom and then rip it up, let it fall back and rip it again. His spoon trick worked in triggering some reaction bites from bigger fish under the school.

Pop Secret

Few fishing techniques surprise me anymore, but when I saw local favorite Brandon Perkins, Webster and Neal each thrashing the water with a saltwater-style popping cork teamed with some kind of little floating fly behind it, I had to dig out my binocs for a closer look.

When I asked about the popping cork at weigh-in I just got big grins. Fair enough. I know when pros want a little more time for an unconventional technique to shine. To my knowledge, their popping cork rigs did not pay off with many fish during the event. Apparently it had worked pretty well at some point during pre-tournament practice rounds.

And so it went. As noted, when compared to the volume of historical information on other tournament lakes in summer, the book on Wheeler Lake in August is pretty paltry. But the anglers who fish in the Forrest Wood Cup are good enough to write their own scripts, and make history in the process. ■

by Rob Newell

A CUPFUL OF TAKEAWAYS

I always find the Forrest Wood Cup to be an intriguing event, mostly because it's usually held in August on a Southeastern impoundment. Yes, I know, there are other times and other places that would make for better fishing, but that's what makes the Cup so unique: It's held on an ultra-challenging venue for that time of year.

There is a ton of tournament history on Okeechobee in January, on Rayburn in February, on Santee in April and Kentucky Lake in June. But have you ever tried to find any rundowns on Wheeler Lake in August?

Exactly.

Where do the fish go? What do they do? How do you catch a bass in the "dog days" of summer?

When 50 of the best anglers in the world show up and pour years of fishing expertise into cracking the Wheeler Lake code in the searing heat of August, some interesting fishing information is going to surface in the results. Here are some of the takeaways I garnered from the 2016 Forrest Wood Cup on Wheeler:

Topwaters Were Tops

Two primary patterns produced success during the Forrest Wood Cup: running far back into creeks to find resident bass savoring the cooler currents and shade, and chasing schooling fish on the main lake. In either case, topwaters dominated the event. Not only did John Cox win the championship on a topwater frog and a buzzbait, other creek-running top-10 finishers such as Jacob Wheeler, Todd Auten and Bryan Thrift scored key fish on buzzbaits and poppers, too. Those targeting schooling fish relied on topwaters heavily as well. In the end, topwaters of some type played a key role in the catches of nine of the top-10 finishers.

Stay in School

I've heard of waiting on schooling fish to bite, but Michael Neal took it to an extreme at Wheeler Lake, sitting on one tiny schooling spot for nearly four days in

(continued on previous page)

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