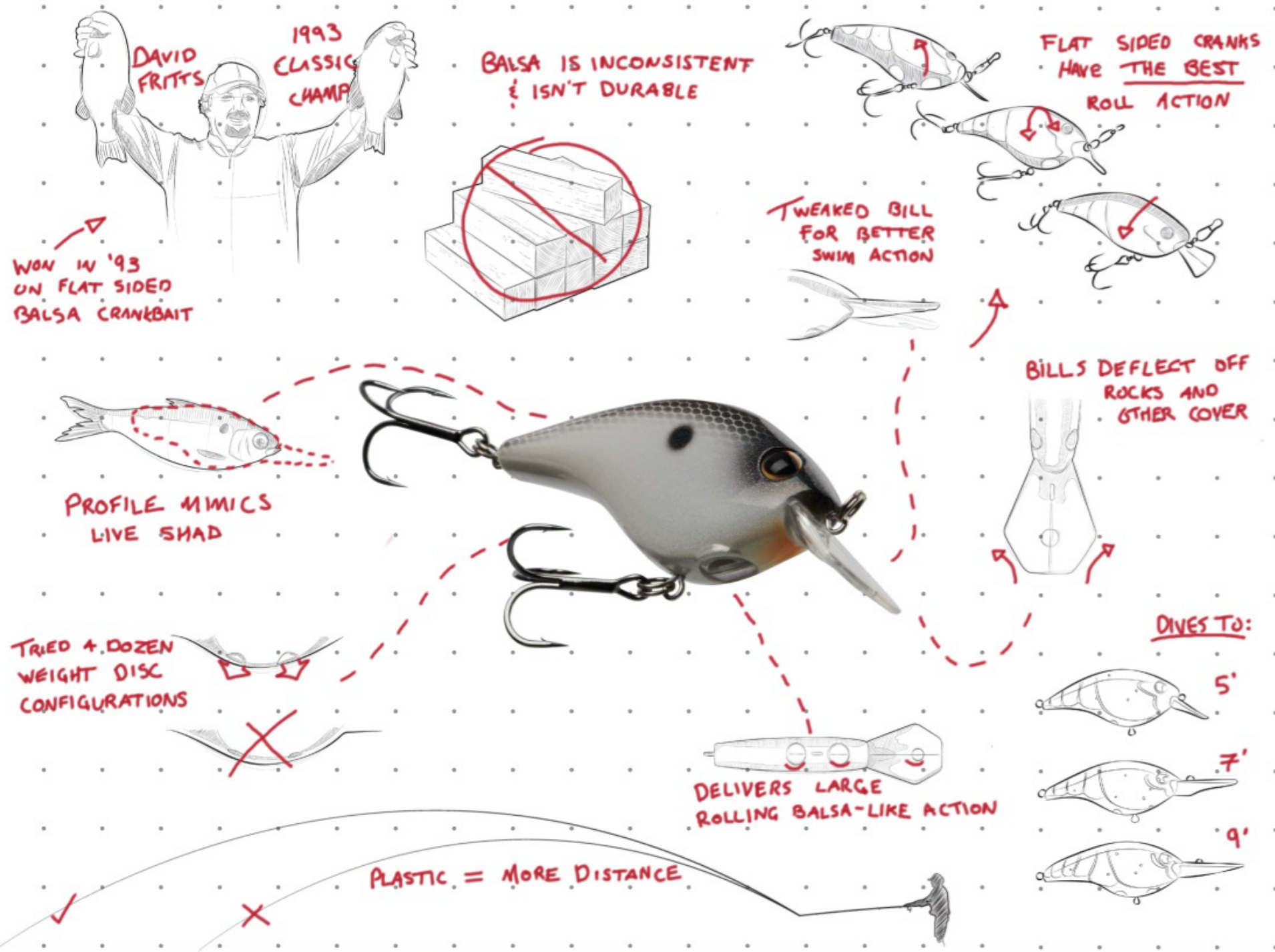




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A close-up, high-angle shot of an Abu Garcia Revo Rocket fishing reel. The reel is primarily red with black accents and components. The handle is on the left, featuring a black grip with a textured pattern. The main body of the reel is red, with 'Revo ROCKET' printed in white on the side. The spool is black with a silver-colored ring. The text '10.1:1' is visible on the spool, and 'SWEDISH ENGINEERED' is printed on the red body. The background is dark and out of focus.

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Worm fishing doesn't have to be an exercise in patience. Flip to page 20 to see how Elite Series pros up the pace to inspire more leaping lunkers throughout a day of fishing. Cover illustration by Doug Schermer.

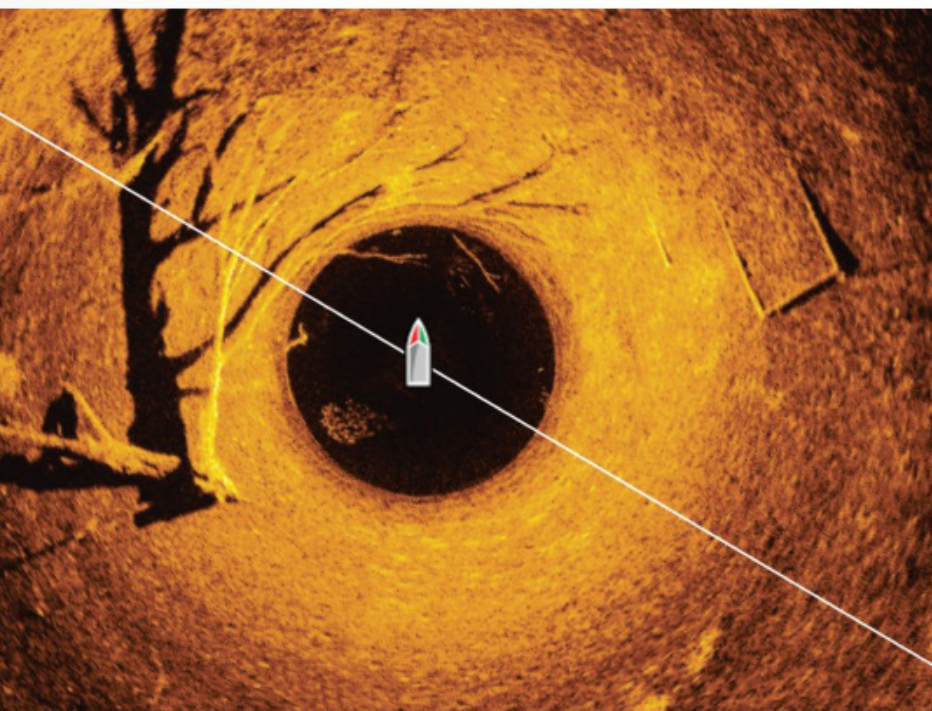
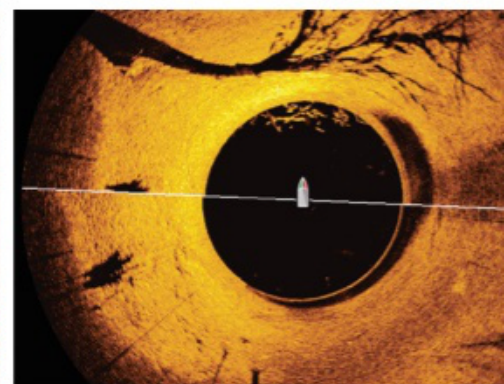
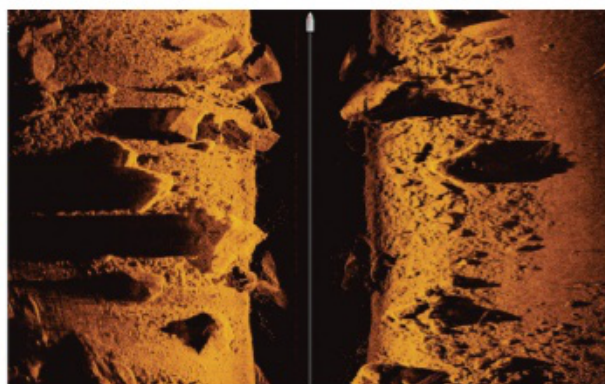
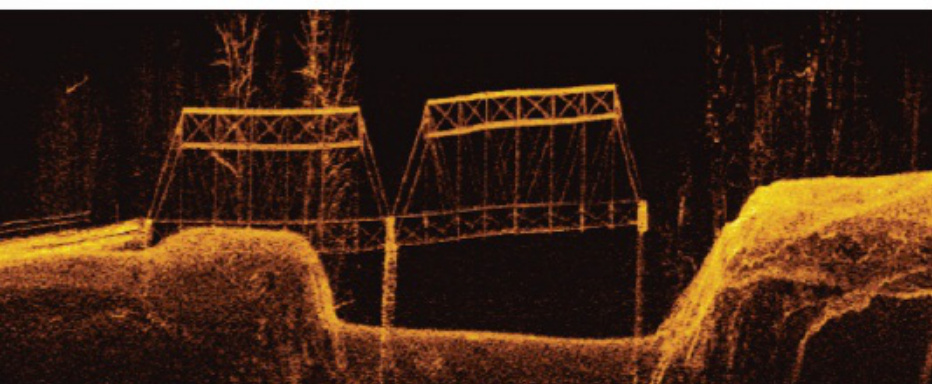
Bassmaster Magazine ISSN 0199-3291 is published nine times a year in January/February, Mid-February, March, April, May, June, July/August, September/October and November/December by BASS, 3500 Blue Lake Drive, Suite 330, Birmingham, AL 35243. Yearly Dues: U.S. — \$30; Canada — \$45; Outside U.S. and Canada — \$55. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Bassmaster* Magazine, PO Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and additional mailing offices.

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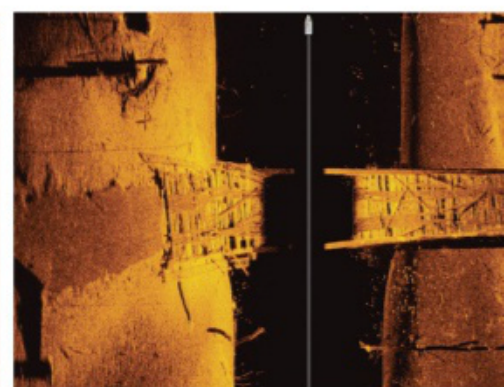
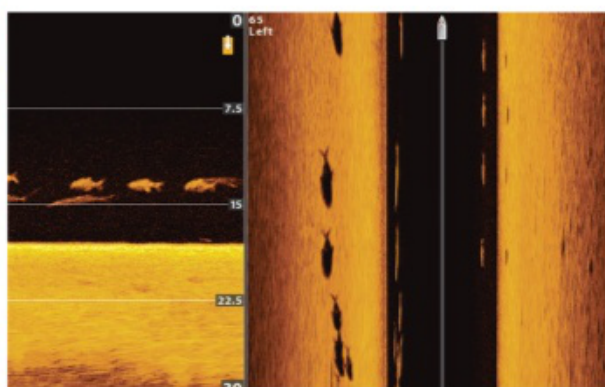
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Published by B.A.S.S., LLC
 3500 Blue Lake Drive, Suite 330
 Birmingham, AL 35243

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First Cast

Livesay Living Right

Before Texas angler Lee Livesay even made the pitch, the situation had “catastrophe” written all over it.

Not only was he pitching to a thick, nasty clump of grass on Florida’s St. Johns River, he was pitching over a concrete walkway. If he set the hook on a small bass with heavy tackle, he could likely just flip it right over the walkway and into his boat. If it happened to be the big bass he was hoping for, there was gonna be a problem.

After setting the hook and realizing the size of the bass, Livesay’s first words were, “This is gonna be a problem.”

So ... no surprises thus far.

What happened during the next 45 seconds, though, provided one of the most exciting fish catches in Bassmaster Elite Series history.

Livesay laid chest-down on the deck of his boat, pulled the boat closer to the dock and used the butt end of his rod to grab the line that was holding the fish.

So many things could have gone wrong. The concrete could have cut his line. He could have fallen in head first. He could have dropped the rod. The fish could have flopped just one time and been gone.

But in the end, Livesay was living right — and he landed a fish that helped propel him to a sixth-place finish at the 2019 Power-Pole Bassmaster Elite at the St. Johns River.

[The Shot]

“I was about a hundred yards away, but I could see that he pitched over a dock,” said *Bassmaster* photographer Andy Crawford. “He was fishing his first Elite Series tournament, and I thought I was about to see a rookie mistake. Instead, it was one of the craziest things I’ve ever seen and one of my favorite photo galleries of the year.”

Get In The Zone



I DON'T GIVE advice often, because it is typically bad. However, I am confident in this little nugget: If you are an angler between the ages of 13 and 19, register to fish the Big Bass Zone Junior Championship (BBZJC). If you are outside this age range, pass along the advice to someone that fits the bill. Let me explain why.

First, the event removes just about every hurdle that exists in traditional bass fishing competitions. For one, it is an online derby. Once a fish is caught, two photos need to be taken showing the length and girth, and then submitted through the event's website (thebbz.com). Once registered, a competitor can fish wherever they'd like (river, pond, lake, etc.), however they want (from the bank, from a kayak, from a boat), whenever they want (now through Aug. 1). The entry fee is \$25 for one state, \$50 if a competitor wants to fish multiple states. And the goal is simple: catch a big bass. The angler who catches the biggest bass in each

state will represent that state in the championship event to be held on Lake Pend Oreille in Idaho. At this event, more than \$300,000 in prizes will be awarded, including a fully rigged Bass Cat boat. No, that number is not a typo.

Actually, before a cast is ever made at the one-day championship, anglers will receive over \$1,000 in gear. Beyond the boat, prizes include scholarship money to Bethel University, trips to the Amazon and Lake El Salto by Anglers Inn International, electronics, trolling motors and much more. To get an idea of how this event will go down, let me explain some of the unique aspects of the 2019 edition.

All 48 anglers were paired with a boat captain provided by the BBZJC. The morning began with breakfast provided by The Willows Club by Anglers Inn, who also provided a sack lunch for each competitor. After blastoff, each angler spent half a day on the trolling motor. One fish was kept for weigh-in. While the competitors battled it out on Lake Pend Oreille, boat rides were provided for the parents who wanted to get on the

water to watch their student angler compete. Bill Lindner had a film crew following the action on the water to create a one-hour show. At the weigh-in, the leading angler sat in the Bass Cat hot seat, hoping not to get knocked off. The weigh-in was live-streamed on *Bassmaster's* Facebook page (more than 40,000 people tuned in). The last angler sitting was awarded the keys to the new boat, and was then swept away in a limo to the awards dinner. The other competitors piled into a stretch limo heading to the same destination. At this banquet, all anglers lined up in the order in which they placed and chose the prize they wanted. And a surprise guest, Elite Series angler Brandon Palaniuk, showed up and gave an inspirational speech. Simply put, it was an extraordinary experience for all involved. And all it took was \$25 and a big fish.

This year, after an angler submits a bass, he or she can go to thebbz.com and check the leaderboard, which is updated in real time. One thing to remember is that a fish caught in a B.A.S.S. Nation High School event, for example, can also be submitted to the BBZJC. Actually, any fish legally caught between now and Aug. 1, which is when the event ends, can be a contender. So, register and fish on your own terms. I'd love to tell you where to go and what lure to use, but my advice in that department is not likely to punch your ticket to Pend Oreille.

“The last angler sitting was awarded keys to the new boat, and was then swept away in a limo to the awards dinner.”

JORDAN LEE

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Drew CookHometown: Midway, Florida

Last year, you capped your first Elite Series season by winning Rookie of the Year. How much does that mean?

Without a doubt, it was really meaningful. I've said this before, but the Rookie of the Year in 2019 was huge. Ten years down the road, when the Patrick Walters and the Garrett Paquettes and the Luke Palmers of the world are all household names, it's going to mean even more.

We had the largest rookie class in Elite Series history, and it was the stoutest rookie class of all time if you ask me. We weren't just a bunch of dudes that came out of nowhere. We knew who we were, we had fished against each other before, and we knew that we were all good. It's a big deal now, but it's going to be even bigger in the future.

As huge as that Rookie of the Year title is, you were inches away from the Angler of the Year trophy. What did you learn from that race?

Well, the main thing I learned is that you cannot have a single bad day. It is very, very volatile. I blew that AOY on the third day at Tenkiller. Just that quick, and it was gone. Up until that point, I knew that AOY was serious stuff, but I didn't know how quickly it could change. It didn't hinge on a bad tournament; it hinged on a bad day. I really feel like I left it out there on Tenkiller, so I'm definitely going to be gunning and trying to get back at it this year.

Do you feel like you were prepared for that race mentally?

I don't think so. I just embraced it. The AOY race was a great opportunity and a great chance for exposure.



By The Numbers

Age: 25 Total Tournaments: 20 Classic Appearances: 1

Top 10 Finishes: 5 Times in the Money: 15 Top 30 Finishes: 12

Total Weight: 737-15 Career Winnings: \$171,995

But was I prepared for AOY out of college or the Opens? No. Now, fishing in high school and college, fishing the Nation and fishing the Opens, that did prepare me for the Elite Series. I felt like I was taking another step up the pyramid instead of a giant leap like guys would have to make years ago. Nothing else

that happened this year came out of left field. It was all stuff I was expecting, but that AOY race was not something you can prepare for.

You mentioned fishing in high school. Was the goal always to end up here?

This was definitely the end goal. I wanted to be on the

SHORT STRIKES

Spinnerbait	ChatterBait ¹
Worm ²	Jig
White	Green pumpkin ³
Country	Rock
Tacos	Burgers
Burgers	Pizza
Power-Pole ⁴	Spot-Lock
Fluorocarbon ⁵	Braid
Coffee	Tea
Doughnuts	Biscuits ⁶
Canada	Mexico ⁷
Inshore ⁸	Offshore
Spinning	Baitcasting ⁹
Fish in 30 degrees	110degrees ¹⁰
Ice fishing	Multiday salt-water trip
Fish in the Amazon	Fish in Africa

¹ I feel like that's more diverse and you can catch them anywhere you can with a spinnerbait.

² Growing up in Florida we really didn't deal with jigs unless you were flipping it. I do use a jig a lot now because they hit it.

³ It works everywhere.

⁴ Although I use Spot-Lock a lot, I don't think I can live without Power-Poles.

⁵ I have only one choice? Fluorocarbon.

⁶ A doughnut is a doughnut, but you can get a bacon, egg and cheese biscuit.

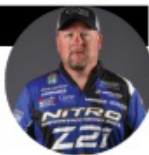
⁷ I love to go after el grande bass.

⁸ Bass fishing? I choose the bank. But if we are in the ocean, I want offshore.

⁹ Baitcaster because you have more power.

¹⁰ I have to go with 110; I feel like I'm pretty used to that. Besides, you can always turn on the air conditioning by going for a lap.

THE ANGLER



Jamie Hartman knows what you're feeling. After a couple of long tournament weekends on the water, your forearms are throbbing, your wrists seem to have weights wrapped around them and your hands feel like they've been in a trash compactor. Sometimes, that's the price you pay for hunting down the biggest fish on a body of water filled with dozens of other bass anglers gunning for the same prize.

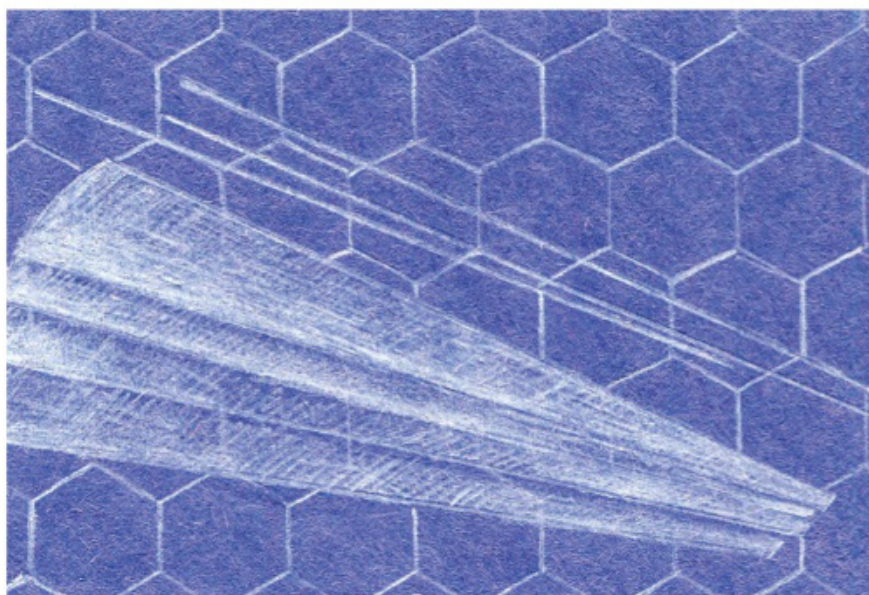
These days, most tournament anglers are wielding serious electronics, powerful boats and a library full of knowledge while they're on the water. That means every advantage you can find is a meaningful one, and Hartman says he's found one under his very fingertips: a carbon-fiber rod.

BLUE-COLLAR BREAKDOWN

A decade ago, carbon fiber was the en vogue, space-age material of choice. Though it's been around since the 1950s, improvements in manufacturing techniques meant the material once primarily reserved for military use was popping up in consumer products from sports cars to bicycles by the mid-2000s. And a few years ago, that trend made its way into fishing rods.

"Matt Cashion is the original designer of the rod I use," says Hartman. "He's a scientific guru, an engineer and a chemist with a doctorate. He could have gone anywhere in life, but he decided to make a fishing rod." Indeed, Dr. Matthew Cashion does hold a Ph.D. in chemistry with a concentration in advanced materials from Virginia Tech. But you won't find him roaming the hallways of NASA or SpaceX. Instead, you're most likely to see him on the water or at a fishing expo.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT



Hartman uses the Cashion Elite Series carbon-fiber rods in the same way that professional cyclists leverage the ultra-light, strong material: to reduce fatigue. A lighter bike means each pedal over the course of a day takes less effort, resulting in less wear on a cyclist's body at the finish line. A lighter fishing rod does the same thing. However, Hartman says he's found some added benefits of carbon fiber that are specific to our sport.

"The rods have no cork, no buffer between the handle and the rod itself, which just throws the sensitivity through the roof. If I'm fishing brush and laydowns, I can feel every little branch. I know when I am coming over a branch or when I am kind of coming up from underneath it. That, paired with the lighter weight of the rod, allows me so [many] more opportunities to find and set the hook on the right bite.

"Any technique where I am fishing a slow, methodical pattern benefits from these rods. I'm the kind of guy who likes to feel every rock on the bottom. A swimbait, for instance, is hard to detect a bite on. It's a very disciplined technique, and you sometimes have to wait for a little tick. With this rod, you feel that tick and it goes right through the line and into the rod immediately, which has made a big impact on what I am looking for and the way I like to fish."

Product Spotlight

The Cashion Rods Elite Series line of casting and spinning rods features models created with proprietary carbon-fiber blanks. The blanks are crafted using unidirectional technology that promotes increased sensitivity. Fitted with Fuji microguides, a Fuji reel seat and carbon-fiber grips, the range comes in technique-specific models that closely align with common graphite rods found around the industry. Shaky head, swimbait, frog, flipping, drop shot, jerkbait, crankbait, worm and jig models are all available. The MSRP ranges from \$199 to \$219.



FUTURE FORECAST

At the dawn of a new decade, Cashion's company is one of the most talked about rod brands on expo floors and at boat docks. Does that mean every serious angler will be fishing with carbon fiber in another five years? Doubtful.

Aluminum bicycles still sell in large numbers, and plenty of fast cars lack carbon-fiber bodies. But the adoption of carbon-fiber rods does mean that anglers searching for an extremely light rod, a high level of sensitivity and another competitive advantage have one more option at their disposal.

Hartman says the difference he feels between carbon-fiber rods and their graphite cousins is night and day, and he swears that fans he's met around the country feel the same.

"I imagine there is a growing market for carbon fiber," adds Hartman. "At the end of the day, it allows your hands, wrists and forearms to not get worn out. It almost seems like when you put that rod in your hand, that it becomes an extension of your arm. Even if you're throwing a 7-foot, 6-inch rod and you're flipping 3/4-ounce or 1-ounce jigs, it's just so different. For example, I love to punch mats. With this rod, when you are punching mats, even on a sluggish bite, you still feel that fish take the bait. It's made a big difference for me."

After winning two Elite Series events in 2019, one at Alabama's Lake Guntersville and the other at New York's Cayuga Lake, it seems Hartman has plenty of supporting data to prove this carbon-fiber design is here to stay.

This Month By JOE SILLS

DATEBOOK

11 Worship of Tools Day. This could be a clue to clean up your shop or text your fishing buddy. Your choice.

17 St. Patrick's Day. Bass always wear green, but you'll have to join them today.

20 International Earth Day. Consider giving back to the Earth and your fellow anglers by cleaning up a local roadway or launch ramp.

22 National Goof Off Day. Not that you needed an excuse, but there's at least one reason to hit the water today.

25 Waffle Day. Celebrate in a Waffle House or by making waffles for your spouse.

28 Weed Appreciation Day. Surprisingly, a holiday exists based on the worship of hydrilla. Here, here for habitat!

CONSERVATION

Smallmouth bass populations are being threatened by an unlikely suspect — a subspecies of black bass recognized a little over a decade ago, the Alabama bass, Robert Montgomery reports. Alabama bass resemble but grow larger than spotted bass and are able to outcompete largemouth bass and hybridize with smallmouth bass to grow their numbers.

Concerns are currently being raised in Tennessee and North Carolina, where suspected illegal introductions of the fish — transported from the nearby Coosa River system — are negatively affecting fisheries. Alabama bass have all but eradicated largemouth bass from the main body of Lake Norman. Elsewhere, in the Volunteer State, fisheries experts are concerned that the spread of Alabama bass will impact the quality of iconic waterways in the upper Tennessee River system, like Dale Hollow.

ON THE TOURNAMENT TRAIL

1 Mossy Oak Fishing Bassmaster High School Series presented by Academy Sports + Outdoors, Smith Lake, Ala.

1 Mossy Oak Fishing Bassmaster Junior Series, Smith Lake, Ala.

5 Huk B.A.S.S. Nation Kayak Series powered by TourneyX presented by Abu Garcia, Logan Martin Lake, Ala.

6-8 Academy Sports + Outdoors Bassmaster Classic presented by Huk, Lake Guntersville, Ala.

14 Huk B.A.S.S. Nation Kayak Series powered by TourneyX presented by Abu Garcia, Lake Fork, Texas

26-28 Carhartt Bassmaster College Series presented by Bass Pro Shops, Lake Hartwell, S.C.

BASS CITY, U.S.A. | EUFAULA, ALA.

The city of Eufaula, perched on the Alabama/Georgia border, may hold just 13,000 residents, but it packs a gigantic punch in the fishing industry. In 1971, Bassmaster pro Tom Mann hatched a new business in a Eufaula garage. The concept? To make waterproof fishfinders that were fast. Mann named that company Humminbird. The rest, as they say, is history.

45,181 acres Total size of Lake Eufaula

100 feet The lake's maximum depth

40 Years that the Lake Eufaula record bass, a 16-pound, 8-ounce monster, has held

14 Years since a top-tier B.A.S.S. event last visited the historic lake

49 Years that Humminbird has maintained offices in Eufaula

ASTRO TABLES To order Rick Taylor's Prime Times products, visit primetimes2.com. For more months, go to Bassmaster.com/astro-tables.

BEST DAYS				LUNAR PERIODS			
2020 MAR				TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED			
POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL.	MOON RISE	MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	MOON UNDERFOOT
Sun 1			46	10:32 am	3:58 pm - 7:10 pm		3:43 am - 6:43 am
Mon 2			58	11:10 am	4:42 pm - 8:04 pm	12:42 am	4:23 am - 7:35 am
Tue 3			50	11:53 am	5:31 pm - 9:01 pm	1:41 am	5:07 am - 8:29 am
Wed 4			47	12:45 pm	6:25 pm - 9:57 pm	2:41 am	5:56 am - 9:26 am
Thu 5			47	1:44 pm	7:24 pm - 10:54 pm	3:38 am	6:50 am - 10:22 am
Fri 6			57	2:49 pm	8:27 pm - 11:49 pm	4:32 am	7:49 am - 11:19 am
Sat 7			66	4:00 pm	9:32 pm - 1:42 am	5:21 am	8:52 am - 12:14 pm
Sun 8			78	6:13 pm	11:38 pm - Midnight	7:05 am	10:57 am - 2:07 pm
Mon 9			81	7:26 pm	Midnight-2:30 am	7:46 am	12:03 pm - 2:55 pm
Tue 10			69	8:39 pm	12:43 am - 3:15 am	8:23 am	1:08 pm - 3:40 pm
Wed 11			55	9:51 pm	1:49 am - 3:57 am	8:59 am	2:14 pm - 4:22 pm
Thu 12			41	11:01 pm	2:53 am - 4:41 am	9:35 am	3:18 pm - 5:06 pm
Fri 13			32		3:56 am - 5:24 am	10:12 am	4:21 pm - 5:49 pm
Sat 14			29	12:11 am	4:56 am - 6:12 am	10:52 am	5:21 pm - 6:37 pm
Sun 15			31	1:18 am	5:58 am - 7:00 am	11:37 am	6:23 pm - 7:25 pm
Mon 16			40	2:21 am	6:56 am - 7:52 am	12:25 pm	7:21 pm - 8:17 pm
Tue 17			28	3:19 am	7:53 am - 8:45 am	1:18 pm	8:18 pm - 9:10 pm
Wed 18			23	4:11 am	8:44 am - 9:40 am	2:14 pm	9:09 pm - 10:05 pm
Thu 19			23	4:57 am	9:31 am - 10:33 am	3:11 pm	9:56 pm - 10:58 pm
Fri 20			23	5:37 am	10:14 am - 11:26 pm	4:08 pm	10:39 pm - 11:51 pm
Sat 21			34	6:11 am	10:55 am - 12:17 pm	5:05 pm	11:20 pm - 12:42 am
Sun 22			45	6:42 am	11:30 am - 1:08 pm	6:01 pm	11:55 pm - Midnight
Mon 23			57	7:11 am	12:05 pm - 1:57 pm	6:57 pm	Midnight - 1:33 am
Tue 24			65	7:38 am	12:37 pm - 2:45 pm	7:51 pm	12:30 am - 2:22 am
Wed 25			57	8:05 am	1:09 pm - 3:35 pm	8:46 pm	1:02 am - 3:10 am
Thu 26			51	8:32 am	1:42 pm - 4:24 pm	9:41 pm	1:34 am - 4:00 am
Fri 27			44	9:01 am	2:18 pm - 5:14 pm	10:38 pm	2:07 am - 4:49 am
Sat 28			42	9:32 am	2:55 pm - 6:05 pm	11:35 pm	2:43 am - 5:39 am
Sun 29			45	10:08 am	3:37 pm - 6:59 pm		3:20 am - 6:30 am
Mon 30			48	10:48 am	4:23 pm - 7:53 pm	12:34 am	4:02 am - 7:24 am
Tue 31			55	11:35 am	5:15 pm - 8:47 pm	1:32 am	4:48 am - 8:18 am

25 50 75 AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS: ☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☀ = DUSK

WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

STATE OF THE NATION

The inaugural Huk Bassmaster B.A.S.S. Nation Kayak Series powered by TourneyX presented by Abu Garcia kicks off March 5 at Alabama's Logan Martin Lake. That tournament runs in conjunction with the 2020 Academy Sports + Outdoors Bassmaster Classic presented by Huk. That's a long way to say the very first B.A.S.S. Nation kayak series is underway, and there's plenty of time this year to get involved.

The Logan Martin event is followed by a March 14 tilt at Lake Fork, Texas; a May 23 derby on Chickamauga Lake; an August 15 date at La Crosse, Wisconsin; and an August 29 tournament at Clear Lake, California. Each event features a total purse of \$30,000 with a \$250 entry fee.

"You don't have to look very hard these days to find a kayak in the bed of a truck or strapped to the roof of an SUV," said Bruce Akin, CEO of B.A.S.S. "People are bass fishing from kayaks all over the world — and they're doing it everywhere, from big lakes and rivers to small creeks and ponds. With this new trail, we wanted to give those anglers an opportunity to show what they can do from a small craft."

In lieu of a standard weigh-in with weights and scales, kayak tournaments will use photos of fish on a standard measuring board submitted through the TourneyX mobile app. A real-time leaderboard will be available online during the tournament until an hour before "weigh-in."

Entrants will compete for a spot in the 2021 Bassmaster B.A.S.S. Nation Kayak Series Championship at the 2021 Bassmaster Classic. Registration is open to all B.A.S.S. members. To sign up, go to Bassmaster.com/kayak.

Ask The Experts

WHAT'S IT WORTH?

By KARL WHITE

The images below were submitted by *Bassmaster* readers, and our antique tackle expert, Karl White, appraises the value of each unique find. To submit yours, email editorial@bassmaster.com.



Go-Deeper Crab

Harrison Prince, email

\$15 Heddon Go-Deeper Crab. This is the predecessor of the Heddon Crab Wiggler. Made in the 1950s.

Casting Reel

Mike Belliveau, email

\$200 This is an older Shakespeare reel which was made for casting tournaments. I would evaluate this at \$200. Nice reel!



Dunks Popper

Dawn Nassar, email

\$80 Best lure Carter Dunks ever made. It was made in the 1930s. I would value it at \$80.



Spinning Reel

Dennis McDonough, email

\$20 Made in the early 1950s. Johnson had to put a side exit because Zebco had the patent for front exit. Does appear to be a demo because of the cutaway at the top.

For more information on White's History of Fishing Museum, visit historyoffishingmuseum.org.

YOU ASK, PROS ANSWER

By LOUIE STOUT



I'm not a fan of bed fishing, but I do like fishing when fish are on beds. How can I get the most out of a fishing trip without camping on bedding fish?

John Baker, Jacksonville, Fla.

Bassmaster Elite Series pro Cliff Prince

You don't have to be looking at them to catch fish during the spawn; not all fish spawn at the same time. Here in Florida, bass spawn in 2 to 5 feet of water, so all you have to do is find a shallow spawning area and make random casts with a topwater, swimming worm, swimbait or Texas-rigged plastic and you'll still catch fish. By staying off potential bedding areas and making those casts, the element of surprise could work in your favor.

If you fish reservoirs in other parts of the country, understand that the spawn first begins on the north end of the lake because it gets longer exposure to sun and warms faster. If you're looking for prespawn fish, target the points leading into spawning pockets, or you may find them on docks near the mouths of coves.

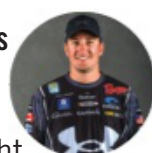


I've heard of people drop shooting for bass on beds. We use a lot of spinning gear for smallmouth. What do you recommend as far as tackle and lures for bedding smallmouth in ultra-clear water?

Ricky Olson, Fargo, N.D.

Bassmaster Elite Series pro Chris Johnston

There's nothing wrong with using light tackle for clear-water smallmouth. I do it all the time and have proved that it gets me bites faster.



I downsize everything; I use a 7-foot medium action spinning rod with a fairly soft tip and 6-pound Tatsu fluorocarbon as a 10- to 12-foot leader tied to 8-pound PowerPro braid. You need that softer rod with light line so you don't break off a big fish or while setting the hook.

My hook is a size 1 Gamakatsu Drop-Shot hook, usually with a 1/4-ounce sinker. I rig the hook about 6 inches above the sinker to keep the bait near the bed. The three baits I like are the Jackall Crosstail Shad, Berkley Fry Worm and Megabass Hazedong Shad.

BASS BOATING

By LOUIE STOUT

Do I really need to change my fuel-separator filter every year, even though I never find water in the old one?

@Jefferylholland2242, Instagram

If you don't mind breaking down or paying for repairs, no, you don't. But if you want to take good care of your outboard and prevent unexpected issues, spend the money.

According to Ry Landry at Yamaha, "the filter will not only capture water that might have gotten into the fuel but also other contaminants that are present in fuel."

"There are a lot more contaminants in fuel than most people realize," he adds. "Changing your filters yearly is a very important step. This helps to ensure you won't be surprised with an outboard failure while on the water."

What are some tips for using livewells to keep fish alive and how to keep them in good working condition?

@Mr everett, Instagram

This is a good question because so often we don't think of livewell maintenance until we see our fish aren't doing well.

Bassmaster Elite Series pro and Phoenix Boats Co. President Gary Clouse says it's important to keep the intake screens clean and free of mud or grass. It's also important to keep the screens inside the livewell clean of grit or crawfish and baitfish pieces that fish may have regurgitated. Periodically, clean the inside walls to remove any mildew or dirt that may build up in the livewell.

"During the warm-weather periods, keep both the 'pump-in' and recirculator pump running so that water is flowing constantly," says Clouse.

As a precautionary measure, be sure to check on your fish throughout the day to make sure they are lively and that fresh water is flowing properly.

On The Line

COMMENTARY

Take a look at some of our B.A.S.S. fans' reaction to the news of Forrest L. Wood's passing:



Donnie D. Martindale

Wow, Skeeter and Ranger bass boat revolutionized the bass boat industry. Thank you Mr. Forrest L. Wood. Rest In Peace, and thank you for your outstanding contribution to the bass fishing Industry.



Charles Fowler

R.I.P. Forrest Wood. Thank you for your vision and innovation to the world of sport fishing. Your legend will never die. May God grant you a perfect rest and a peaceful sleep.



Spencer Longshore

R.I.P. Forrest..knew him well. Did lots of business with him... owned a Ranger...he was a gentleman!!!



Kent Warren

I was lucky enough to have met Forrest when I got my first Ranger and got to talk with him at several tournaments after that. Forest was just like the boat he made, solid as a rock and I enjoyed talking with him. His legacy will live for many years to come. Thank you Forrest for all you did for the sport, fishing, and all of us. May God bless you and your family during this time. Rest In Peace my friend till we fish again one day.

YOU WRITE THE CAPTION!



It's your turn to write a cutline for your favorite magazine. Follow B.A.S.S. on Instagram (@bass_nation) and comment with a clever caption on this cartoon that will be posted on our feed on March 2, 2020. If your caption is chosen, it will be printed in an upcoming issue.

Last Month's Post



7,586
429

Last Month's winner:

I present to you "The man with the longest arms ever" @zach_powers21

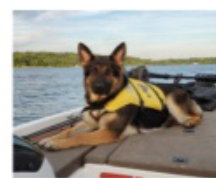
Precious Moments

We met Mr. Wood 3 years ago. What a great spirit he had. He spent at least 30 minutes with us talking and paid special attention to our disabled daughter. He wouldn't let us leave until he gave us an auto-graphed picture of him and his lovely wife and had us take a picture of him and Hanna. Rest in peace and thanks for the memories!!!

Keith Woodham



FACEBOOK.COM/BASS



Ernie Lally
My girl Jade love's being on the boat



Destin DeMarion
Our girl Bama (the roll tide version) after we made the Elites last fall.



Summer L Jones
She'll be ready by spring

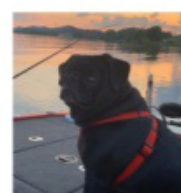


Jeff Wever
Unfortunately I will not have any more times like this with my favorite fishing

partner! He was my sidekick no matter what I was doing, miss him terribly!



David Oliver
About time she had her own Kayak



A.J. Ison
My Zoey loves the water!

TWITTER POLL

My favorite worm type is:

31% Ribbontail worm

40% Straight-tail worm

5% Boot-tail worm

24% Curled-tail worm

Flip to page 20 to see what some of your favorite Elite Series pros prefer.

Spring Load-Up



Huk Tournament Series Raingear

Jacket: \$230-\$240

Bib: \$230 | hukgear.com

Features:

- Designed with 20k/15k wind and waterproof ratings, the rainsuit features fully taped seams and flaps over all the zippers, eliminating the possibility for wind or water seeping through.
- The bibs only come in black, but the jacket is available in red or, for \$10 extra, a black-and-white Mossy Oak Elements pattern.



Mossy Oak Tournament Hoodie

\$29.99 | store.mossyoak.com

Features:

- The hoodie is made from a 96/4 polyester/spandex performance-blend material with two-way stretch for extra comfort and mobility.
- The smooth outer surface sheds light water and rain, while the soft fleece inner lining, draw cord adjustable hood and hand warmer pocket keep you warm under a multitude of conditions.
- It's available in two colors — both featuring Mossy Oak's Elements pattern — and sizes S-3XL.



Old Town Sportsman AutoPilot

\$3,799.99-\$3,999.99 | oldtowncanoe.com

Features:

- Available in both 120 (12 feet) and a new, larger 136 size (13 feet, 6 inches), the high-tech fishing machine now features a Minn Kota electric motor that kicks out 45 pounds of thrust, and it comes standard with the ground-breaking Spot-Lock technology.
- Anglers can command the kayak with a touch of their thumb, using the included i-Pilot remote.
- The boats feature angler-friendly accessory tracks, tackle storage and tournament-ready catch tray channels with added storage.
- The new XL rudder is designed for improved boat control in both forward and reverse, and it comes standard with a shallow-water anchor mount — and so much more.

Quantum Reliance

\$99.99-\$139.99 | quantumfishing.com

Features:

- A fully corrosion-resistant reel makes the Reliance ideal for freshwater and saltwater.
- Each Reliance graphite rod is built for toughness. A traditional cork handle comes standard, and the reel seat is made of cushioned stainless steel, while the guides are built with heavy-duty construction to withstand abuse of a big bass.
- The Reliance series is available in six different powers and actions.



Xcite Baits Raptor Tail Chunk

\$3.49 | xcitebaits.com

Features:

- The Xcite Raptor Tail Chunk is the perfect craw imitation to dress up jigs or can be effectively rigged under multiple presentations, including finesse tactics and Texas rigs to be fished near docks, grass, submerged brush and shoreline laydowns.
- The specially designed claws create realistic subsurface movement, mimicking a fleeing crawfish that hungry bass will find hard to resist.
- The lure's buoyancy will cause the bait's claws to float upward when it's stopped, enlarging the target, which naturally increases hookups.
- The bait measures 3 inches, comes six to a pack and is available in 17 delectable colors.



[More Must-Haves]



Berkley X5 Braided Line

\$13.99-\$209.99

berkley-fishing.com



Nishine Lure Works Erie 95SD

\$18.99

nishinelureworks.com



X Zone 16-inch Deception Worm

\$5.99

xzonelures.com



Berkley Snap Jig

\$5.99

berkley-fishing.com



“ I have so much confidence in the Johnny Morris CarbonLite reels that I bet my Bassmaster Classic® win on them. The baitcaster in the 7.5:1 gear ratio accounted for about half of my winning fish. I know it will help you win your tournaments or enjoy a fun day of fishing!” —Ott Defoe

A handwritten signature of Ott Defoe in black ink.



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Available at



basspro.com

Cabela's

cabelas.com

There are specific times when Elite Series pros turn to fast-action worming. Here's how they decide between the two most popular tail options and where each will provide upgrades at the weigh-in stage



Employing soft-plastic worms in constant-motion retrieves seems to go against the lure's intended purpose. However, there are times when you simply can't beat the presentation.

Photo: Laurie Tisdale

Swimming Worms:

To Thump or Squirm

BY MARK HICKS

SWIMMING A WORM over and through shallow grass is a mainstay in Florida, and this ploy can draw strikes anywhere in the country where bass lurk in similar cover. The most popular worms for this presentation sport squirming-action tails, such as Zoom's UltraVibe Speed Worm or Yum's Thumpin' Dinger. Thumping paddletail worms are another option, such as Gambler's Paddle Tail Worm.

Since these types of baits are employed for the same presentation, when should you thump or squirm a swimming worm?

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To Thump or Squirm



Zoom's swimming worms have been go-to baits for Bassmaster Elite Series veteran Gerald Swindle for more than 15 years. He Texas rigs these baits with a 4/0 straight-shank VMC worm hook and varies the weight of the bullet sinker.

Thumping

"I swim the original Zoom Speed Worm when the water gets a little dirty," Swindle said. "Say I'm fishing shallow hydrilla at Kissimmee and the wind turns the water from crystal clear to hay colored. That's when the extra thump of that little paddle tail can trigger bites."

Since the bass can't see the worm as well in off-colored water, Swindle matches the bait with a 1/8-ounce weight so he can retrieve it slowly over and through likely ambush places. "If you wind it too fast, the bass might not have time to react to it," Swindle said.

Shallow cover that is being muddied by wind and waves generally lends itself to slinging a spinnerbait or some other power presentation. However, bass can be spooky even under these conditions due to heavy fishing pressure, Swindle pointed out. In this situation, the thumping vibrations of a paddletail swimming worm can coax bass into biting when they are too shy to attack more aggressive baits.

Squirming

Besides the 6-inch UltraVibe Speed Worm, Zoom makes a 7-inch Magnum UltraVibe. Swindle opts for the smaller version in most instances. He matches it with a 3/16-ounce bullet sinker when fishing grass in clear water.



Bassmaster Elite Series pro Gerald Swindle often turns to the Zoom Speed Worm in stained water. Though some prefer a spinnerbait in that situation, Swindle says the Speed Worm can be better for pressured fish. Photo: Le Ann Swindle

The slightly heavier weight allows for a faster retrieve, which works well in clear water where a bass can see and quickly react to a swimming worm. An upbeat retrieve is also more likely to prompt a reflex strike. The squirming tail kicks out vibrations, but not the hard-thumping cadence of the paddle tail.

Beyond Grass

Swindle doesn't limit his swimming worm gambit to shallow vegetation.

"People underestimate the swimming worm," Swindle said. "Don't just think of it as a bait for shallow grass. Use your imagination. I've caught bass swimming a white pearl UltraVibe around docks over 70 feet of water on Smith Lake during the shad spawn."

When pitching and swimming the UltraVibe to docks, Swindle matches it with a pegged 1/4-ounce bullet sinker. He does not peg the sinker when

“It's kind of a finesse-y alternative to a swimbait, especially when there's not a lot of wind.”



fishing grass. If the water is stained, Swindle will swim the paddletail Speed Worm around docks.

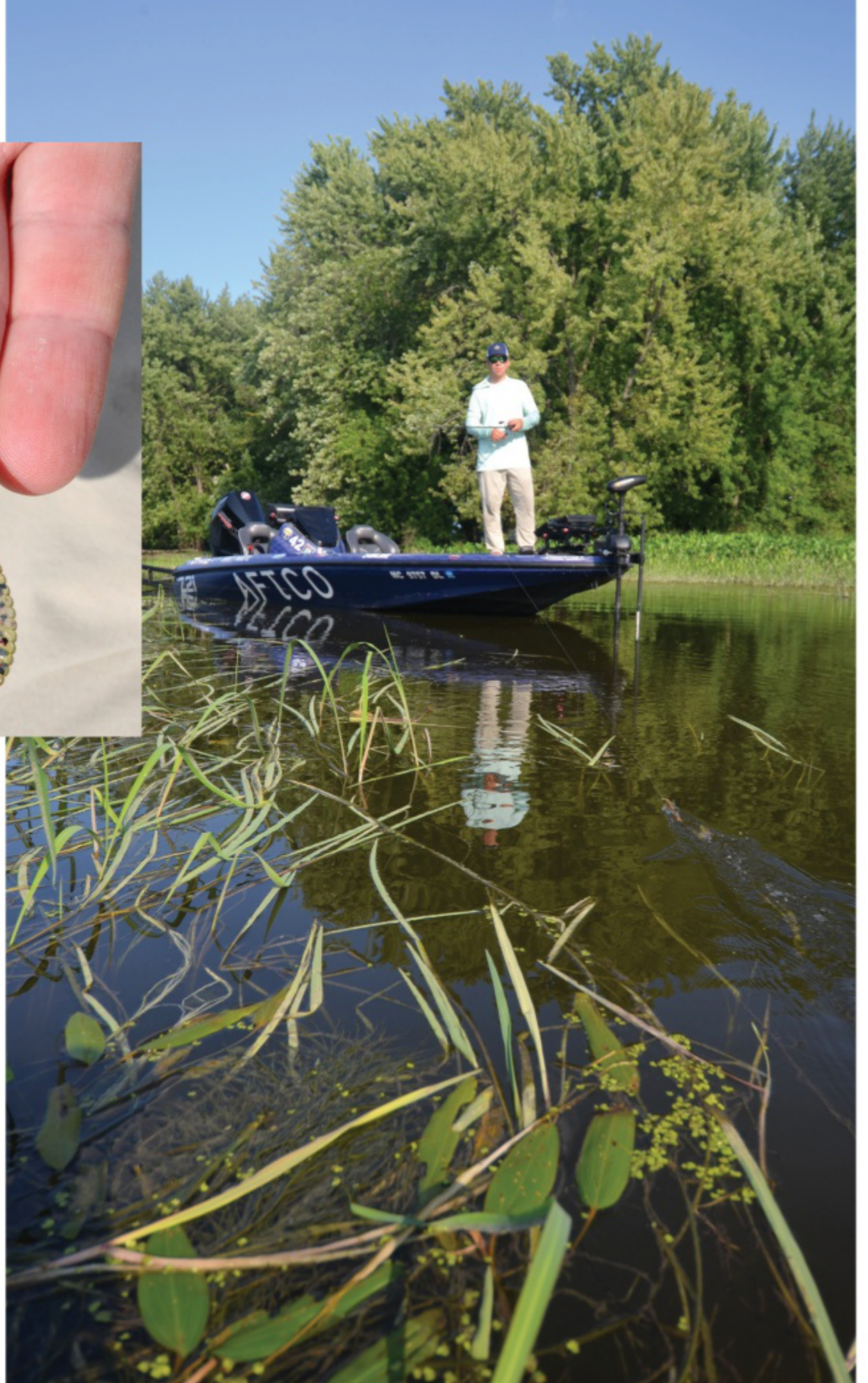
"It's kind of a finesse-y alternative to a swimbait, especially when there's not a lot of wind," Swindle said. "You can fish docks behind guys that are casting spinnerbaits and bladed jigs and get bit."

Dual-Purpose Swim Worms

Several bait companies offer paddletail and squirming-tail swimming worms. There are also dual-purpose swimming worms that are capable of thumping or squirming, including the Tour Swim Worm from Big Bite Baits and the Machete Worm from Reaction Innovations.

Both worms feature a paddle tail that has perforations. Straight from their respective packages, these worms have large, heavy-thumping paddle tails. You turn them into squirming worms by splitting the tails along the perforations.

Elite Series pro Garrett Paquette dotes on the Big Bite Baits Tour Swim Worm. He fishes it 90% of the time as a squirming worm. It produces especially well with a swimming retrieve when he fishes grass in Florida or grass in any lake that has been stocked with Florida-strain largemouth.



Paquette sometimes fishes the Tour Swim Worm, tail split, weightless on the surface like a subtle buzzbait.

Photos: Mark Hicks, Laurie Tisdale (bait)

Shaky Head Paddle Tail

When Garrett Paquette plies offshore structure with crankbaits and jigs, he often mixes in a 3/8-ounce shaky head jig dressed with the 7.5-inch Big Bite Baits Tour Swim Worm. The paddle tail gives the shaky head more action than a regular straight-tail worm, and the bait is big enough to tempt bites from heavyweight bass at places like Gunter'sville and Kentucky Lake.



To Thump or Squirm

"I'm not saying Northern bass won't eat a swimming worm, but it's just really more deadly on Florida fish," Paquette said.

The Tour Swim Worm comes in 5.5- and 7.5-inch sizes. For swimming applications, Paquette opts for the longer version. He Texas rigs it with a 5/0 Gamakatsu worm hook and a 1/8- to 3/16-ounce bullet weight, and he retrieves it steadily just under the surface over shallow grassbeds. He regards this as a finesse swimbait presentation.

When bass lurk under pads and matted grass with openings, Paquette fishes the worm weightless and drags it on the surface over the cover. This makes the squirming tail churn the water "like a subtle, buzzing frog."



Paquette splits the tail of his Tour Swim Worm to squirm through shallow grass for near-surface explosions.
Photo: Mark Hicks

Another rigging option, shown here with the Yum Thumpin' Dinger, is to Texas rig on a weighted-shank hook, like this VMC Drop Dead option. Photo: Laurie Tisdale



The 7.5-inch size is heavy enough that it casts well with baitcasting tackle, Paquette added.

Over the past few seasons, Paquette has done well with a squirming worm by working it through grass with a pull-drop retrieve. He steps up to a 1/4-ounce tungsten bullet weight for this presentation. This makes the worm sink faster and gives the tail more action, both of which prompt reflex strikes.

This presentation paid off for Paquette on the first day of the 2019 Bassmaster Elite Series tournament at South Carolina's Winyah Bay. He made the 100-plus-mile run up the Cooper River, which left him with only four hours of fishing time. By going to work with his pull-drop retrieve in 3-foot-deep hydrilla beds, he boated a dozen bass on the swimming worm that yielded a limit over 12 pounds. It was good enough to put him in sixth place. Sadly, the bass were not as cooperative on Day 2 and he fell to 29th place.

Flip & Pitch

Paquette reserves the 5.5-inch version of the Tour Swim Worm for flipping and pitching presentations. He leaves the paddle tail intact because it slides through cover more easily than the squirming version and puts out subtle thumping vibrations as it sinks.

"It's a really good bait in pressured fish situations," Paquette said. "I rig it with as light a weight as possible, usually 1/8- to 3/16-ounce, depending on the cover. I've done really well with it flipping pads in Florida."

Swindle also flips and pitches Zoom's paddletail Speed Worm. It slides through cover without hanging up as a squirming or curled-tail worm will do, and the paddle tail gives the bait more action than that of a straight-tail worm.

"When I flip the Speed Worm, I pop it up and let it fall," Swindle said.



Swimming Worm Options



Gambler Paddle Tail Worm, 5 inches, gambler-lures.com



Lake Fork Hyper Worm, segmented body, 4-, 5- and 6-inch sizes, lftlures.com



Reins Paddle Tail Worm, thick body, 6 inches, reinsfishing.com



Zoom Speed Worm, 5.5 inches, zoombait.com

Dual-Purpose Worms



Big Bite Baits Tour Swim Worm, 5.5 and 7.5 inches, bigbitebaits.com



Reaction Innovations Machete Worm, 7.5 inches, reactioninnovations.com



13 Fishing Ninja Tail Ninja Worm, fleshy, segmented body, 5.5 and 7 inches, 13fishing.com



Bass Assassin Ding Dong Worm, 6 inches, bassassassin.com



Bruiser Baits SpeedSpade Worm, streamlined body, 8.25 inches, bruiserbait.com



Culprit Fast Vibe Worm, beefy body, 6- and 7-inch sizes, gambler-lures.com



Gambler Burner Worm, 5 inches, gambler-lures.com



Yum Thumpin Dinger, 6 inches, yumbait.com



Zoom, 6-inch UltraVibe Speed Worm and 7-inch Magnum UltraVibe Speed Worm, zoombait.com

Tackle

Garrett Paquette: 7-foot, 5-inch medium-heavy Douglas XMatrix casting rod, 8.1:1 gear ratio reel and 16- or 18-pound Sunline Shooter fluorocarbon

"I like a long rod so I can drive the hook home in all swimming worm situations," Paquette said. "If I'm

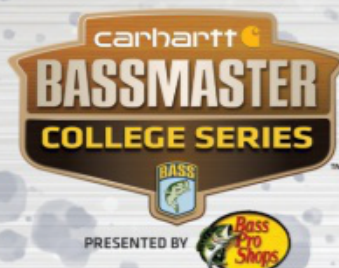
buzzing the worm over really thick grass, I might go to 50-pound Sunline FX2 Braid and a 7-foot, 6-inch heavy action rod."

Gerald Swindle: 7-foot medium-heavy casting rod, 6.8:1 Lew's reel and 16-pound Sunline Shooter fluorocarbon



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Tweaking Soft-Plastic Rigs

By BRUCE INGRAM

Although hooking a bait wacky style on a drop shot is nothing new, Crews uses a 4-foot leader and a bigger soft-plastic bait to ply for big bites in deep water.

Photo: Bruce Ingram (Crews), Laurie Tisdale (bait)



ANGLERS HAVE A REPUTATION for not leaving well enough alone. Elite Series pro John Crews is no different. He is constantly toying with how to make baits perform at a higher level by simple and slight modifications. Here are a few of his favorites.

Wacky Shot

The Salem, Va., angler calls this twist on the drop shot a wacky shot. “It’s kind of like a wacky-rigged drop-shot getup with a superlong leader,” says Crews. He lets the bait descend close to the bottom, then lifts it up to eliminate slack. But the key to strikes is allowing the bait to flutter slowly downward without the line restricting the bait.

“I prefer to fish a wacky-rigged worm up near the surface,” says the 12-time Classic qualifier, “but this approach allows you to fish the same rig off the bottom and in a way and place that the bass aren’t used to seeing. Bounce this rig on a slack line up and over any cover that you come into contact with. The fish will come up to get the bait and then head right back to the bottom. That’s when you set the hook.

“Using a heavier than normal weight on short pitch casts, you can also stroke a wacky-shot worm in deep water without moving the bait very far like you normally would on those types of casts.”

The 39-year-old Elite Series pro adds that 48 inches is about the longest leader that an angler can handle, as well as hook the bait onto a guide. Shorter, standard 24- to 36-inch leaders don’t allow you to attain enough separation from the bottom so the bait can perform its seductive quivering gambit.

A 3/8- or 1/2-ounce drop-shot tungsten weight, a size 2/0 Gamakatsu G-finesse drop-shot hook and a Missile Baits 48 (4.8-inch stickbait) complete matters. Crews details that the weight helps keep a worm in an area

better as this is not a setup designed to cover water. In fact, the wacky shot is a perfect example of a zone bait plied around deeper individual stumps, brushpiles or any kind of cover sonar identifies.

Crews describes his own company’s Missile Baits 48 as “a big on the ends, thinner in the middle, weighted stickbait” perfect for deep-water pulsating action. Effective colors are all over the spectrum, depending on the light conditions and baitfish present. Crews admits he has probably caught more on green pumpkin than any other color with this technique. Other components are a Cashion 7-foot, 4-inch Drop-Shot rig rod (the longer rod gives more control of the bait) and a Daiwa Tatula LT spinning reel. Line choice consists of Sunline SX1 12-pound-test braid with a leader of Sunline Sniper fluorocarbon in 8-pound test.

A prime example of how well the wacky shot can perform took place in a 2017 Elite tournament on Lake St. Clair.

“On the first day, the bass were on an expansive, deep flat with sparse grass, and I caught about 20 pounds on a crankbait,” recalls Crews. “On the second day, the crankbait bite started to slow, and on the third, it just died. I switched to a wacky shot, and three of the five keepers I caught were on that rig.

“I don’t think I would have had as good a day without the wacky shot. It kept the stickworm about 1 to 2 feet above the bottom and allowed the fish to come up and hit it. If I had used the drop-shot rig, the bait would just have disappeared into the vegetation.”

Like many B.A.S.S. pros, John Crews is a master at coming up with ideas on how to tweak soft-plastic baits so they perform just a little bit better.

Here are three ways he does it

Tweaking

Soft-Plastic Rigs

Reverse-Shimmy Rig

Usually, the pros will place an internal weight in a soft-plastic bait's head. Crews, though, likes to position a 1/32-ounce weight in the tail end of a soft-plastic lure. On a slack line, this causes the lure "to shimmy and glide away" from an angler. He says this approach only works on certain baits (for example, his company's Missile Baits 48) because of its earlier-described shape.

"Mike Iaconelli gave me the idea to put a nail weight in the tail of soft plastics many years ago," says Crews. "When I started doing so with weighted worms, sometimes the bait would get crooked, which would prevent it from gliding backward. Or sometimes the bait would just spin in circles. Now I have close to a 100% reverse shimmy with the 48 worm."

Crews employs a Texas-rigged 5/0 Gamakatsu offset round bend worm hook with this getup and 14-pound-test Sunline Shooter fluorocarbon. A high-speed 7.1:1 baitcaster reel and a 7-foot, 2-inch Cashion Worm Rod complete the lineup.

"This rig is meant for pitching and also skipping baits well under docks," says Crews. "It will work from prespawn through late fall. The rig is also ideal for bluffs. Plus, it's especially good during the spawn or around laydowns and grass clumps

anytime. The heavier fluorocarbon is great for getting a fish out of dense cover."

At another 2017 Elite tournament, this one on Lake Champlain, Crews once again experienced success on a tweaked getup.

"The first day, I fished a feeder creek with current," he recalls. "It was a classic situation of bass holding on undercut banks in outside bends. I caught a quick limit on a Missile D Bomb, but I just felt like I should've done a lot better."

After Texas-rigging his worm, Crews will insert a nail weight into the bait's tail to create his reverse shimmy rig. This modification makes the lure glide away from the angler, and into cover that would otherwise be unfishable.

Photo: Bruce Ingram



"So, I switched to the reverse-shimmy rig and caught my biggest bass of the day, a nearly 4-pounder, and ended up culling all of my other keepers except one. With the reverse shimmy, I saw a noticeable difference in the number of bites I got and the size of the fish."

Weighted Shaky Worm

The shaky head rig has been one of the most popular options across the country for many years, but Crews has found a way to tweak it by adding a weighted worm.

"This version of the shaky rig displaces the weight so it's not near as likely to get hung up, yet [it] still maintains contact with the bottom," says Crews. "You also can use a lighter-weight shaky head, which further decreases the chances of hang-ups. The ultimate weight of the whole rig [usually 1/8 or 1/16 ounce for the weights and 1/2 ounce for the bait itself] remains the same, but, again, snags are much fewer."

For baits, once again the Elite pro opts for his Missile 48, touting its versatility, but he admits other weighted worms do work for this technique.

"Because the Missile 48 is such a dense worm, it has plenty of weight to push the whole rig to the bottom," he continues. "What causes people to become frustrated with shaky heads is they lose so many of them, especially around rocky areas and current. But with the head off the bottom now, even beginning fishermen can fish this modified rig and catch bass consistently."

For this tweaked rig, Crews uses the same reel and line combination as with the wacky-shot technique. However, the one difference is his decision to go with a medium action 7-foot, 3-inch Cashion spinning rod because that rod does not have quite as soft of a tip. Setting the hook through the thicker worm is essential, so a rod with a little more power is needed.

Crews remembers enjoying tournament success on the weighted shaky worm getup a decade or so ago when he was fishing current and lots of rocks — a recipe for breaking off constantly. The bass proved extremely finicky that day, especially on reaction lures.

"I came across some riprap in heavy current and decided to switch to the weighted shaky worm rig," he says. "I just let the rig bounce off the rocks as I worked my way down the riprap. I ended up having a Top 20 finish. If I had gone with a regular shaky rig, I don't think I would've caught those fish."

Ever since, Crews says he has kept the weighted shaky worm rig "in his back pocket." Indeed, all three of these rigs are ones that anglers might want to consider as back-pocket baits or even as primary options.



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Africa's big-bass record holder
rules the spring season
through his singular passion
for catching giant fish,
a tireless work ethic
and an epic understanding
of the spawning cycle



The Spawnmeister

By GEORGE ROBNEY

Wayne Naude, The Spawnmeister, with South Africa's record largemouth bass of 15.86 pounds, caught while sight fishing during the spawn. The common belief among African bass anglers was that Naude would one day break the South African record. Few were surprised when it happened.

Photo: George Robney

NOBODY CALLS WAYNE NAUDE LUCKY. The African trophy angler has caught too many 10-pounders for that. However, divine providence cannot be ruled out the day he caught South Africa's record bass. It's a great story.

Naude, his brother Michael and father Noddy raced confidently down the lake at the 2018 Loskop Dam Big Bass Bonanza and got dibs on a hot springtime location, but their dreams were unexpectedly scuttled. A faulty trolling motor sent them speeding back to the launch.

The crestfallen anglers tied to a bony snag at the boat ramp to grapple the whipping winds and choppy waves. They made adjustments, fixed the motor and prepared to rejoin the tourney when Naude saw something in the water that stopped him cold: big, bulging, bottle-cap eyes.



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The Spawnmeister



Along with a drop-shot rig, Naude reveals one of his special tube combos that consists of a Big Shot Tube, weighted hook with rattle, foam buoyancy to lift the tail and an attached silver blade for flash. Naude suggests blade flash aggravates the bass and helps him maintain eye contact. Photos: George Robey

“Bass eyes bug out when they get over 9 pounds,” says South Africa’s best spawn-season angler as he fondly recalls the day’s events.

Naude took notice of the subsurface terrain and pinpointed a laydown with two bass, one on each side in about 9 feet of water. He could make out a saucer-shaped nest directly under the log but overcast conditions made visualization difficult. The spawning bed was onerously positioned, but he began to target the larger fish with a football jig and Pit Boss trailer.

“I would cast past the nest, then tilt my body to drag the lure under the log,” he says with a perfunctory eyebrow flutter.

Michael caught the aggressive male quickly, and upon release, the 3-pound buck returned to the nest. The departure and reappearance seemed to aggravate the big female. Minutes ticked away as Naude and his brother worked the giant sow.

The trio watched from their position along the boat ramp as another of Africa’s great spawn anglers, Ruan Wahl, pulled in with a certified bass of 13.98 pounds. Naude knew the fish below him was a good one and kept at it.

“I worked the bass for an hour before she got aggressive, but every time a boat came in or out of the launch ramp, she would leave the nest and cause me to start over,” Naude says.

Finally, after multitudinous casts, the big female daintily lipped the bait. Naude trimmed the jig skirt short, threw another cast and saw the white gape of her open mouth. He set the hook and chaos erupted.

The giant bass, raw and full of fight, raced under the log and exploded on the opposite side. Naude pushed his rod tip into the water, aimed the trolling motor toward open water, dragged the bass free and wrestled it on board.

“I just didn’t know ... I’ve caught plenty of bass in the 5-kilogram [11-pound] class and they are all about the same length. It’s the girth that gives them weight,” Naude says.

The inquisitive trophy angler went directly to the weigh station and was not prepared for what appeared on the certified tournament scales: 15.86 pounds, a new South African record.

“When they said 7.192 kilograms, I couldn’t believe it. I can’t describe the feeling. It’s like someone handing you the keys to a Ferrari,” he gushes.

I rub elbows with Naude on the front deck of his bass boat, lean forward and peer into the water. The perseverant angler stands on a milk crate and pitches a drop-shot rig with a white Fluke relentlessly at what he calls a “big momma.” It’s mid-August, spawn season in the southern hemisphere, and bass are nesting on cue.



Sight fishing in clear-water lakes that hold big Florida bass has become a passion for trophy hunter Naude.

Try as I might, I cannot see the bass. It is about 12 feet below in the clear water of Loskop Dam. A slight surface ripple adds to the difficulty. Naude does not divert from the action and grows increasingly silent. He continuously positions the boat and never stops pitching.

“I can’t see it, Wayne. Are you sure there’s a bass down there?”

“There’s three bass. A small male tight on the nest and two others on the deep-water side, one quite big,” he replies curtly.

He’s chasing ghosts, I think.

Naude, slim and fit with short, dark hair, a swarthy complexion and infectious smile, owns a legendary reputation for trophy bass. Every spring season, without fail, the likeable young angler who exudes politeness and no-nonsense honesty lands multiple bass in the 10-plus-pound class.

The Afrikaans angler learned about fishing from his father, mostly from the bank, but earned occasional boat invites from friends. Naude worked hard to buy a boat, and in 2011 caught his first 11-pounder while sight fishing. The enterprising angler decided to focus on trophy fishing and perfect the spawn-season technique.

I doff my Costas and rifle in my fishing bag for a pair of prescription Maui Jims. Maybe it will make a difference? Naude has his back to me, still pitching.

“When they said 7.192 kilograms, I couldn’t believe it ... it’s like someone handing you the keys to a Ferrari.”

I notice two things on his shirt: the numbers 7.192, the weight of his record bass in kilograms, and a bible verse, 1 Corinthians 10:31.

“They both have special meaning for me,” Naude says simply and without explanation.

The relentless angler has been working the ghost fish for nearly an hour. I ask if it always takes so much time. He tells me when a big female is locked on the nest, it can be caught in the first five casts, but when she hangs back, it can take much longer.

“You need patience to catch big spawning bass,” says the man known affectionately as *The Spawnmeister* and suggests many anglers have the will but not the composure. They become frustrated and start working the shallower, smaller, more easily caught males.

Suddenly, Naude’s rod tip dips violently into the water. I grab the net as a fat, meaty fish breaks water. It’s over in a flash. The hook pulls free and the bass disappears. Emotionless, Naude looks at the afternoon sun and suggests we find another.

“Wait, how big was that one?” I ask, stunned by his indifference. The big-bass guru guesses 9 pounds, “a good fish, but nothing special.”

THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Naude guides the boat along a cascading bluff of rock and loose gravel, his eyes to the water and head on a swivel. He creeps catlike with the sun in his face and soon points out another spawning bed. I see one small fish on the washed-out, saucer-like nest, but he assures me there is another. The Spawnmeister restarts his pitching regimen and talks while he works.

Naude says the first order of business for any angler who hopes to catch a spawn-season trophy is to choose a lake with good water clarity and big bass. He points to Africa’s Loskop Dam as a great example. It is gin clear, surrounded by rock and gravel, with lots of ledges, and is a known producer of monster bass.

The importance of rocky ledges plays into the complex formula Naude uses to find big bass. First, he tells me, big rocks absorb heat from the sun, warm the water and attract both mudfish forage and the first spawning bass. Gravelly depressions between the rocks become ideal nesting sites, especially near unique isolated structure like wood.

THE BASS FISHING EDGE: ARTLURE

Wayne Naude may be best known for landing South Africa’s record largemouth bass, but he earns equal acclaim for catching Africa’s smallest species. The legendary angler from the Mpumalanga province competes at the highest level of a sport called Artlure and credits the competitive event as his edge for trophy bass.

Artlure is the act of catching multiple species on an artificial lure. The scoring system is designed so that two species will always trump a single fish, no matter the size. Target fish range from the smallest minnows to giant catfish and include many species of bass fodder.

“Artlure fishing has helped me understand bass by knowing where to find the smaller fish they feed on,” says Naude, a member of the Midka Artlure Club and a two-time National Artlure team member sanctioned by the South African Artificial Lure Angling Association (SAALAA).

Success at Artlure requires intimate knowledge of all fish species, where they are located at various times of the day or

season and how to find them. Naude points to the mudfish species as a great example of how it benefits his trophy bass fishing acumen.

“The diet of a trophy bass is about 80% mudfish in the 15-centimeter [6 inches] class. Artlure fishing has taught me exactly where to find them,” says Naude. Mudfish are the high-protein forage species that pack weight onto bass.



Artlure requires anglers to understand and catch a variety of species, like this mosquito fish (above). Artlure has proved to be the ideal training ground for Africa’s best bass anglers.

Photos: George Robey

Of course, Africa is home to a wide range of tilapia species and other individual fish types that round out the bass diet. Each of them is scorable for Artlure anglers and provides unique insight into the underwater ecosystem.

“I am not the only one to benefit from Artlure. Many of Africa’s top tourney bass anglers started with Artlure,” Naude says.

Africa’s big-bass record holder plans to join Africa’s bass tourney circuit sometime soon, but for now enjoys competitive Artlure and his relentless hunt for trophy bass.





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The Spawnmeister

The trophy hunter looks for spawning sites where the shoreline drops moderately to about 20 feet. The biggest females nest in 9 to 16 feet of water, and a cascading shoreline compacts the search area. Wind-washed shorelines agitate the water and produce best, he adds.

“You can find spawning bass on the ledges without having to move all around,” Naude says in deference to flats, where the search area becomes too expansive.

The Spawnmeister suggests anglers who fish blind in dingy water can maximize time by working confined ledge areas and reminds all spawn fishermen not to dismiss high boat traffic areas where prop wash moves water over nests, especially in silted lakes.

Naude talks but never diverts his eyes from the water as he works the big ghost fish. Still, I cannot see it. The sky pinkens over the Waterberg mountains and the water turns inky. My resolute and unflappable friend talks and casts in rapid succession until I interrupt the conversation.

“It’s getting dark. There’s no way you can see a bass down there!”

He concedes the obvious but assures me a target fish is below the boat. It’s one he has been watching. I ask how many nests he monitors.

“I try to keep up with about 60 nest sites,” Naude says impassively.

The trophy angler begins his quest in early spring when male bass move shallow. Naude calls it “prep work” and suggests anglers who record nest locations early will save time when bigger females arrive two to five weeks later.

Loskop Dam, South Africa, is surrounded by a game reserve with plentiful amounts of wildlife. Ruan Wahl, another of Africa’s great spawn-season anglers, with a 13.98-pound bass caught at Loskop Dam.



A Venzilla Tokyo rig and Magnum Nightmare Craw lured this bass from its nest. Photos: George Robey

The veteran spawn angler begins his search for gravid trophy females when water temperatures exceed 60 degrees and the August moon becomes full. The first big girls of the season stage near the nest sites, awaiting nature’s siren call. They will cleave to the nest only for a day or two. It’s all a matter of timing, Naude says.

“I approach a spawning bed and watch how they react,” he tells me. If the male and female leave the site and do not return immediately, they are not ready.

The degree of attachment tells him when and how to fish. A trophy sow that wanders off but stays close and faces the bed often responds to a lure. In this instance, Naude pitches a white fluke or paddle tail on a drop shot. He dances it at eye level and searches for the “sweet spot,” generally on the deep side of the nest. It might take an hour or two before she responds. Maybe not at all.

Big, obtrusive lures, like football jigs, tubes or creature baits soaked in scent and adorned with rattles, work best when a fish is solidly locked on the nest. The chunky bottom baits stir up both the nest and the ire of target fish. A female bass becomes most aggressive when laying eggs and a brief time after and is often caught in the first few casts, Naude says.

“You hardly ever feel the strike, and that’s why I use white or pink lures — to set the hook when it disappears,” says Naude of his color preference when sight fishing deep nests. It’s almost dark now and my friend is still at it. I ask the obvious question.

“If you can’t feel the strike and you can’t see in the water, what are we still doing here?”

We begin a slow trek back to the boat ramp. It’s been a good day. Africa’s big-bass guru hooked and lost a solid trophy-sized bass. He shrugs and tells me we could have caught lots of 3- to 5-pound males.

“But that’s not why I’m here. I’m after the one big fish of a lifetime,” says Naude.

And that is a monumental task for South Africa’s current record holder.



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The Bounty of Backwater Wing Dams

By **DAVID A. BROWN**
SENIOR WRITER

Elite Series pro Garrett Paquette mines a secondary channel wing dam with great success in the spring, when bass stage on the structure preparing to spawn.

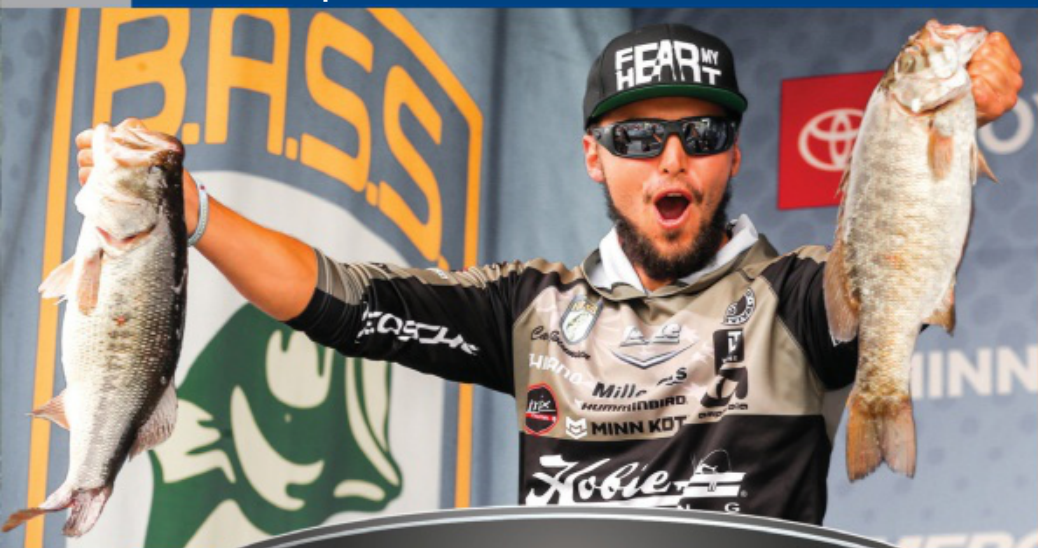
Photo: David Brown

When bass move out of the main river, this unique structure becomes a gold mine for both green and brown bass

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Designed to keep a river funneled into its main channel, wing dams aid in navigational efficiency, while also adding fish-friendly features. Main-river structures get most of the attention, but don't overlook the ones installed in smaller tributaries, as these rock walls can be your ace in the hole when the main-river fish play hard to get.

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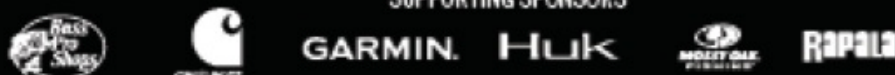
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The Bounty of Backwater Wing Dams

THE ATTRACTION

Bassmaster Elite Series angler Garrett Paquette of Michigan notes that both scenarios have a place in his overall river game plan, but there's a definite logic to when he'll depart the main strip. Current is key in either deal, but those back channels can offer seasonally strategic options.

"If there's depth nearby and current running through that back channel, I think that's a better option than the main river, because it's not going to get blown out; it's more protected and the water clarity is a little better," Paquette said. "You're not dealing with as many variables — including boat traffic and barges — as if you were on the main river.

"Also, it feels like you're confining the fish. You don't give them the whole main river; you give them just a little channel, and it puts more fish in a higher-percentage area."

Moreover, there's no denying the back-channel wing dam's stealth factor. Back to the restaurant thing: Those big, neon signs visible from the main highway pull significantly more customers than the mom-and-pop diner humbly tucked into the strip mall.

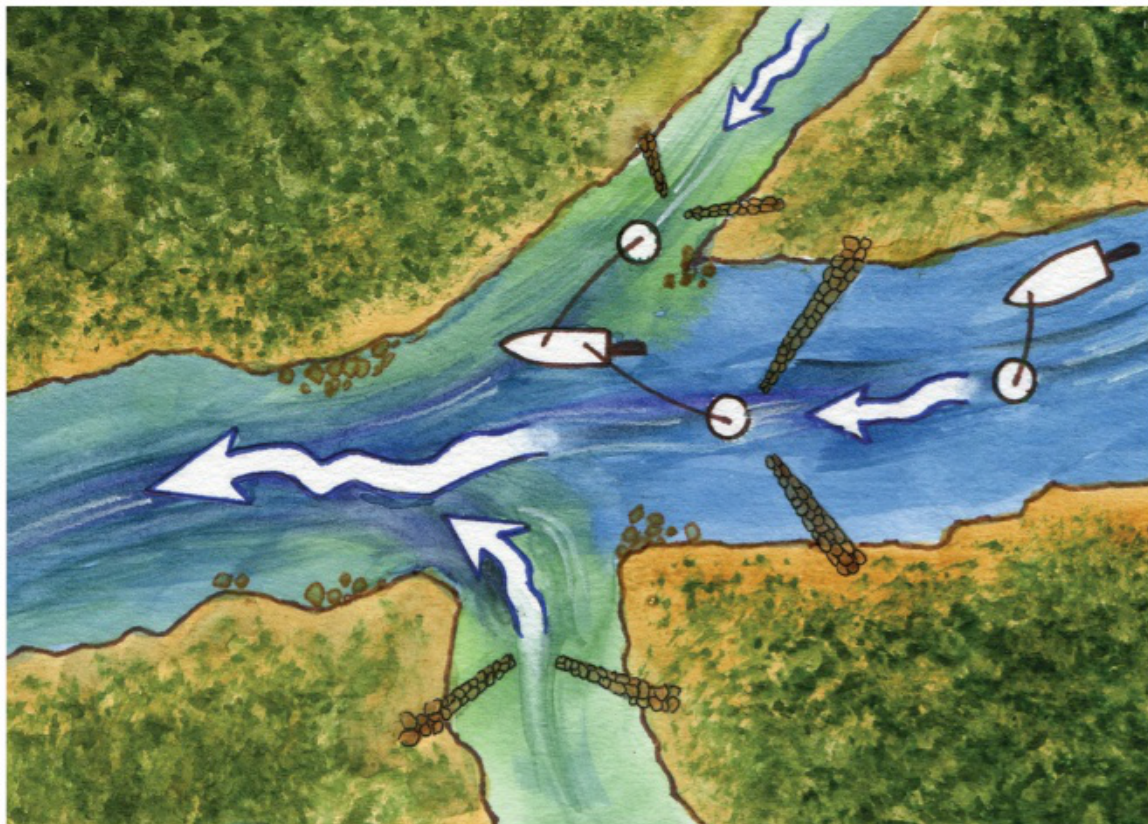
"You're usually not dealing with as much fishing pressure," Paquette said. "They're a little sneakier and a little harder to find. You may have to travel a mile or two back into some areas to find them, so you kind of have things to yourself."



Paquette names a shallow crankbait as his go-to wing dam bait. He can cover a lot of water quickly to identify the hot spots of the structure. Photo: David Brown

"In the summer, I like to get closer to the main river, because you're not getting as much stagnant water. The temperatures are a little cooler as you get closer to the main river and there's a little more current coming through, as opposed to dying off as you get further back in."

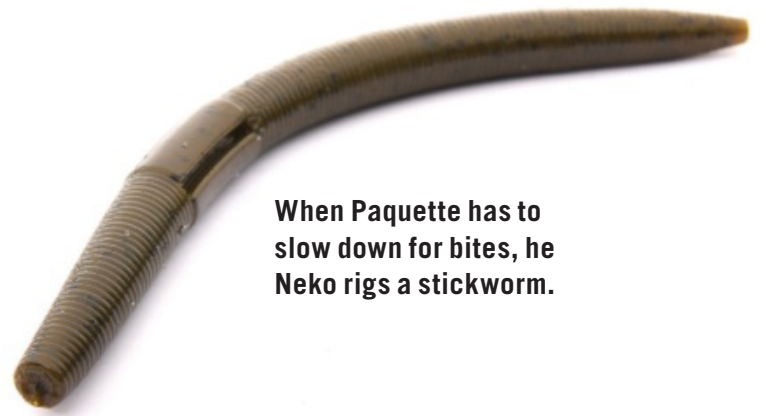
In lower latitudes, such as the Arkansas River or James River, Paquette prefers the prespawn/post-spawn period to midsummer, before rising heat pushes most fish into the main river. However, that's relevant to geography, as some of the upper Mississippi's back-channel wing dams could hold fish in all but the depths of winter. (See **SEASONAL SCHEDULE**)



Boat position and casting angle are critical when targeting wing dams. The ideal scenario is to present your lure with the current. Also, notice where eddies are forming and present your bait through the slackwater from several angles. Photo: David Brown; Illustration: Jonathan H. Milo

A swim jig gets the first nod from Feider when targeting wing dams.

Photos: Laurie Tisdale



When Paquette has to slow down for bites, he Neko rigs a stickworm.

THE APPROACH

Unlike main-river wing dams, where he has the option of sitting upstream and working a bait down-current, basically keeping it in one spot for less-active fish, Seth Feider said he'll always slide downstream of a back-channel structure and cast upstream. The preference here, he said, is simply a matter of availability.

"The back-channel wing dams tend to be a lot shallower, and a lot of them will get silted in so much that there's really not any water on the front side," he said. "It will just turn into a big flat with a nice little 1- to 2-foot drop; whereas the main-channel wing dams are deep on both sides.

"The way those side-channel wing dams are laid out, with that big flat on the front side, if you get on top of it, you're just going to kick silt and stuff all over it. Also, because the water in the side channels is warmer, it seems like the fish want something moving."

WHAT TO THROW

Explaining his bait preference, Feider says, "The main-river wing dams are typically clean rock because of the amount of current that pushes through there, whereas the ones on the side channels tend to get more silted. That leads to more vegetation growth."

Because of the potential snags, he fares better with a swim jig because it's more weedless. Feider likes a 1/4-ounce Outcast Tackle Heavy Cover Swim Jig in white with tinsel in the skirt. He'll pair this with a 3.25-inch white BioSpawn ExoSwim boot-tail swimbait for an irresistible shad profile. Feider will also work a Storm Chug Bug over a wing dam, while the cleaner areas welcome a Carolina-rigged Zoom Speed Craw.

"I go supershort on the leader because of the massive current," Feider said. "I usually do a 12- to 18-inch leader and a lighter weight — like a

SEASONAL SCHEDULE

Seth Feider's clear that any solid object breaking current could, potentially, attract fish. But even though he avoids definitive go/no-go statements, the Elite angler from Minnesota offers a seasonal summary that will help you plan your backwater wing dam strategy.

Spring: Prespawners and postspawners will use the rocky structures as staging areas, so look for wing dams with adjacent spawning habitat, such as backwater ponds and flats. Similar to points in a creek arm, the fish will come and go, but keep checking and you'll often intercept a group on some of your spots.

Summer: After the postspawn transition, Feider finds most of the river large-mouth prefer grass habitat, while small-mouth scatter. Both will use main-river wing dams to feed, but the back-channel structures dwindle. On overcast days with a little wind, the back-channel structures may be worth a look, but Feider said he would not expect much quality as most of the big fish will hold in the main river.

"They get on the wing dams during summer, but they just get so inconsistent," Feider said. "You could fish 100 of them and not get a bite, then pull up on one and catch two or three, and then go



back a day or two later and they're going to be on a completely different one."

Fall: Actually starting in late summer, Feider considers August to October prime time for backwater wing dams. Get to them before the fall drawdown pulls most of the fish to the main river and you'll often find good numbers of quality fish staking out these feeding stations.

"It seems like fall is when they get

really consistent," Feider said. "You can go back multiple days in a row and catch them there."

Winter: Bitter cold months are the leanest period for back-channel wing dams, unless you're talking about lower latitudes. Even there, Feider said the opportunity level is minimal until late winter sees that first wave of prespawners move into the backwaters.

The Bounty of Backwater Wing Dams

1/2-ounce — because you're fishing so shallow. With a long leader, your bait gets so far past your sinker with the current, especially if you're fishing it slow, that you miss a lot of fish, because you feel the bite, but they're 3 feet closer to you than your sinker. You go to jerk and just swing 6 feet of slack and don't really hit 'em."

Calling a medium-diving crankbait his main tool,

Paquette always starts on the end of the wing dam first because that's usually a high-percentage area, given its deep-water break. He'll follow with a buzz-bait, topwater or shallow-running crank before slowing down with finesse presentations.

For the latter, Paquette likes a Neko-rigged Big Bite Baits Trick Stick, which flows naturally in the current with less snag risk than a drop shot or a jig. With any of these baits, he'll work to determine a replicable pattern.

"In an ideal situation, they're sitting near the tip of the wing dam in a feeding mode where you just crank it and go to the next one," Paquette said. "Sometimes they get on top; sometimes they get behind it. That's something you have to determine each day. Some days you have to go through with that finesse worm and slowly fish each one, where the fish are sitting behind the wing dam, just resting out of the current."

SWEET SPOTS

The Ends: As with natural geography, the points of a solid structure create downcurrent eddies and ambush spots that bass will leverage for feeding.

Breaks: Feider looks for breaks or "guts" in a wing dam where flowing water creates distinct focal points. Similarly, loose rocks occasionally tumble from the main structure during installation or over time. These isolated hard spots merit exploration.

Additional Cover: Rivers carry loads of debris, and when drifting wood wedges against a



Feider looks for breaks in wing dams where current creates obvious focal points. He also watches for wood and debris that have washed against the dams and considers those areas "bonus" targets. Photo: Seigo Saito

back-channel wing dam, Feider recognizes this as a bonus worth a few casts. He'll typically work the perimeter with a swim jig and then switch to a Texas-rigged tube or craw to pick apart the cover.

Noting the transient nature of such additional cover, Feider said, "It all changes. One year, that big tree's sitting there, and the next spring, you get a big flood and go back and it's gone. Those are more opportunistic, whereas rock and stuff's never going to move."

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Addressing a common wing dam mistake, Paquette offers this insight.

"I see a lot of guys fish them backwards — against the current — but [during the warmer months] your bites go up exponentially when you're bringing your baits with the current. Sometimes that's hard because you're dealing with a lot of current — you're on the trolling motor more, and it's tougher on your batteries — but it's something you have to fight through.

"You have to have a lot of confidence that there's a lot of fish down there. It's not just a one- or two-cast deal and then you move on. There are usually fish on all of these targets, so going through with different presentations, different bait choices, you can figure out something on one of the wing dams and then run that throughout the system you're fishing."

Most days, Paquette will scout out the best-looking wing dam and meticulously pick it apart to determine the pattern du jour. The best part about an attractive side-channel wing dam is that it typically will reload.

"That's the ideal cover in a river system, so if you pull a couple of fish off, other fish are going to take back that prime real estate," Paquette said.

"Once one leaves, another one comes."

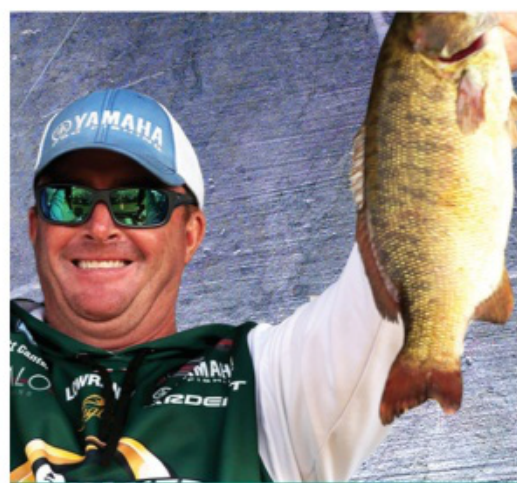


You have to have a lot of confidence that there's a lot of fish down there. It's not just a one- to two-cast deal."



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Smart Tips for Fishing Stupid

By VANCE MCCULLOUGH

A common sight in the tournaments Terry McWilliams fishes in his home state of Indiana. Pictured is McWilliams holding a bass caught on his stupid tube.

Photos: Vance McCullough

Sometimes names can be misleading. Such is the case for Terry McWilliams' "stupid tube" rig, which has proved to be quite brilliant for catching bass in hard cover



The concept of using an internally weighted tube is not new. However, the way McWilliams fishes this particular setup has smart anglers following suit.

NOBODY WANTS A lure that stays hung up all the time.

Unless you're Terry McWilliams. Or one of his nephews. Or any other member of the small circle that has quietly won tons of money on the Stupid Tube.

A standout B.A.S.S. Federation Nation angler who has made the Indiana state championship a couple-dozen times and held his own in the Bassmaster Opens, McWilliams put a scare into the world's best bass pros when he nearly won the 2007 Bassmaster Classic on Alabama's Lay Lake with the tactic.

"All I was trying to do was hang the bait up," says McWilliams. "With the eye coming out behind the nose, if you drag that bait, the front of it hangs up on stuff, and if you put just a little bit of pressure on it, the back end raises up, which gives it the stance of a fighting crawfish."

McWilliams went on to finish fourth, a single ounce behind Kevin VanDam. "My story is his fish didn't weigh more; they were just wetter than mine," chuckles the soon-to-be 70-year-old.

By the time he qualified for that Classic, McWilliams had been picking his competitors' pockets for several years while refining an approach that came to be known as fishing the "stupid tube."

Stupid-tubing is less about a specific lure and more about technique, from how to rig the lure to how to present it, even how to sometimes play the fish first and set the hook later.

"Basically, the stupid tube is just a way of rigging a tube and a jighead. You can do it with any tube. You can do it with several different jigheads. Originally it was done with a round ball head," notes McWilliams.

The setup employs a jighead with the head portion inserted inside the tube, while the hook exits the sidewall of the body and is then punched back through, similar to a Texas rig. With the eye protruding a 1/4-inch back from the nose, the rig has a tendency to glide in wide circles on the fall and, as mentioned, dig in on hard edges and bottom features to stand the lure up. As such, it mimics both dying baitfish and crawfish — two staples in the bass diet.

One shortcoming of the method is hooks don't always penetrate and hold well enough to lock bass down and get them in the boat. McWilliams has addressed that issue. "I lost a fish in the 2008 All-American that cost me [the win], so I started working on a better mousetrap, as far as hooking, and what we've come up with now is probably as good as it gets: the teardrop lead on a 3/0 and 4/0 hook. That works the best because it lays flat on the tube and it doesn't get hung up, and it's got more of a bite to it, so you get a better hook set," he says of the Secret Lures Stupid Tube Jig Head.

The technique offers steady action around wood and rocks and in open water. It shines brightest when current is rolling.

"For me, the key in current when you're fishing a crawfish-style bait, a jig or whatever is not the movement of it," shares McWilliams. "It's the lack of movement of it. In the current, you've got all kinds of stuff floating downstream and moving. But the only thing that moves and stops is something that's alive, like a crawfish."

"If you'll watch the 2007 Classic again, and watch my part of it, every fish that I catch, my bait is not moving. I'm sitting perfectly still, holding my rod straight up in the air, and it's hung up. In that area is

big chunks of concrete.

Where the water is coming out there is a hole. I would throw up into the seam in the current to get my bait to sink to hit that concrete. Once it hit the concrete, I just held it tight, holding it there as long as I could, and then I would put pressure on it to get it to move to the next piece of concrete. If you reeled it any at all, the current would grab your line and pull it out of there. The fish were sitting in that hole, and that 'crawfish' is sitting up there. What do bass do? They nose around in the concrete and root out the crawfish. They would come up there and eat it."

To get 3-pound Coosa River spotted bass out of rough cover on light line, McWilliams used the competitive nature of the bass against them. "When they would eat it, because there were other fish in there, they would swim right out into the river. If I would set the hook, the fish would go right back down in there and break me off. As soon as I felt the bite, the first thing I did was turn the trolling motor to the right, and the current caught the front of the boat and would sweep me out into the river. I would set my hook out in the river the same way the fish were swimming. Then I would fight the fish, and when I'd get done, I'd be 100 or 200 yards downriver and have to fire up the big motor to come back and fish."

McWilliams explains that the tube is made for hard cover. "The way it's designed, it's made to hang up, so if you're fishing weeds, it's not a weedless bait because the weeds catch on the line tie, but it really plays good in wood and rock. A Texas rig, if you pull it up through trees, it slides right through the trees, right through rock. It doesn't hang up, so you can't hold it in a spot and work it. With a Stupid Tube, you pull up and if you catch on something and hold it still — say, on a limb — the back of it is wiggling, those tentacles are moving around."

Often the tube doesn't get left alone long enough to become a fake crawfish. It gets inhaled on the descent. McWilliams emphasizes bait awareness.

"Quit reeling and start feeling. When you make a cast, trip your bail over and don't reel. Just click the bail and tighten up on your line, and the very first thing you do is feel. Fifty to 75% of the bites on the tube are on the initial entry into the water. They grab it. A lot of times they don't go anywhere with it. They just grab it, and if you pop it, that bass just grabbed that crawdad and it popped him in the jaw, and that bass thinks, 'Boy, this is a bad crawdad,' and he lets go of it, and you never realize you got the bite.



The Secret Lures Stupid Tube jighead is key to the success of fishing the technique. The teardrop-shaped lead, paired with the wide-gap hook, allows the hook point to sit flat while offering plenty of bite once a fish eats it.

Photo: Vance McCullough

"I make the cast, and the very first thing I want to do is feel. If I feel the least amount of pressure, I stop. If it shakes the least bit, I set the hook."

McWilliams often fishes tubes on baitcasting gear, stepping up his line (always fluorocarbon) to as heavy as 17-pound test. "That's usually in the reservoirs where they've got some bigger fish or I'm fishing a lot of bushes or trees where, when I get bit, I've got to pull them out of something."

In addition to imitating crawfish and dying baitfish, the internally weighted tube can imitate healthy baitfish, too. "There are times they want a moving bait and I swim it. I swim it a lot, especially the Big Dummy," says McWilliams, referring to the 4.5-inch Secret Lures offering. "It makes an awesome, what I would call, 'glide bait.' I glide it a lot when I feel like they're feeding on bluegill, swimming it more than dragging it."

Any way it's fished, the lure has a strong track record. "I'm just a local amateur," says McWilliams, "but I've qualified for 24 Indiana state teams, and 19 of those I've qualified for with the Stupid Tube."

A couple of his nephews have dominated regional events, catching most of their bass on it. "My other nephew placed third in the All-American and caught 95% of his bass on the Stupid Tube."

"In 2011, my nephew who was brought up fishing with me, Matt McCoy, qualified for the 2012 Bassmaster Classic on it."

So, how did such a great tactic come to be known as "stupid"? It bedevils other anglers as much as it does the fish. "When I retired from the Indiana State Police," says McWilliams, "I set up a guide service with this ol' boy, and he would not throw the tube because you tend to lose more fish with it than with a Texas rig or jig. You get a lot more bites in the first place, but you lose more. Anyway, the year I made the Classic I had a real good year. Toward the end of that season, I came in with a big bag of fish and he walked up and said, 'I suppose you caught 'em on that stupid tube?' and that's how it got its name."



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Jesse Tacoronte

Early Spring

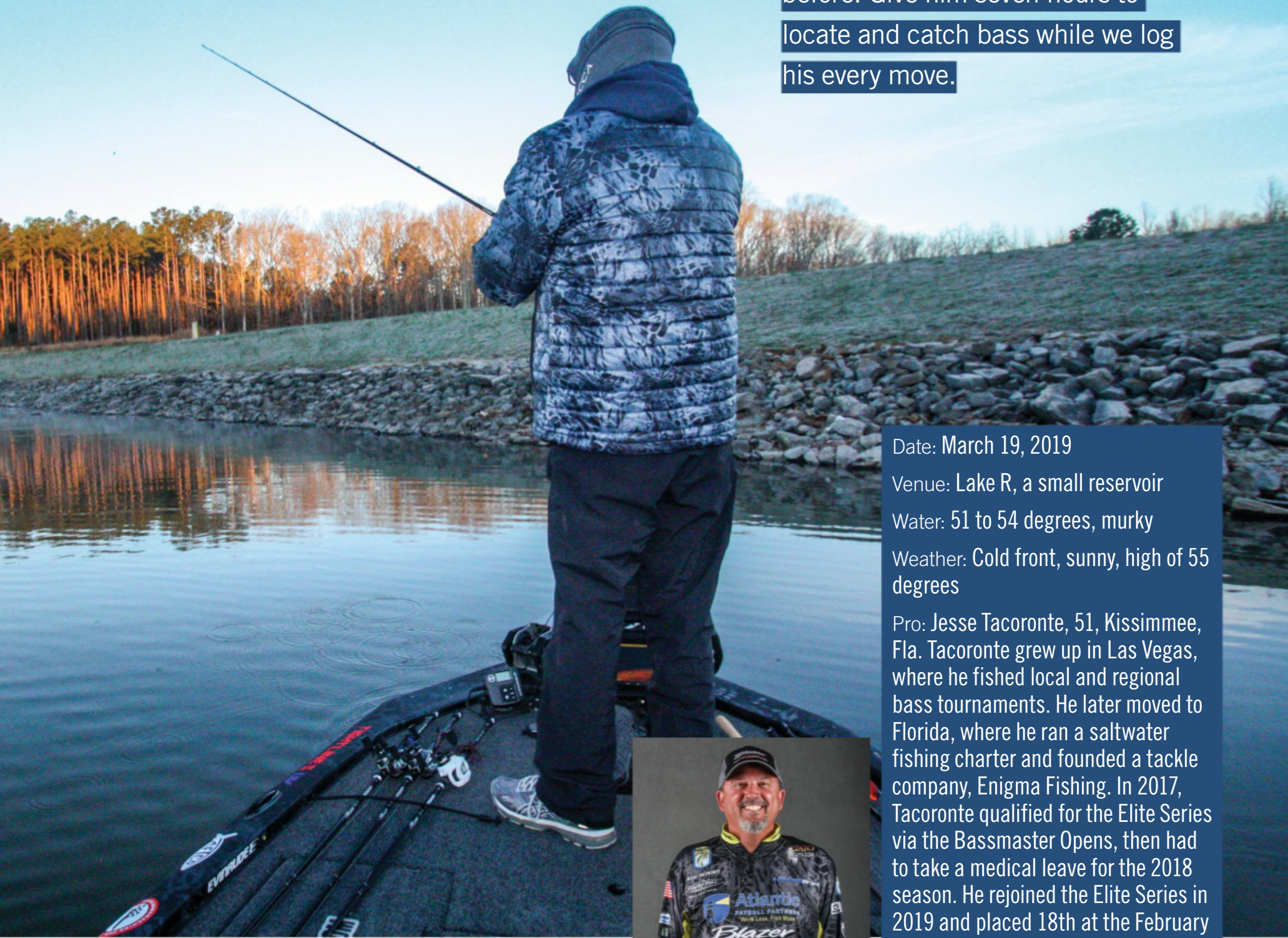


M**MOST PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES** probably have to deal with injuries at some point during their careers, and Elite Series anglers are no exception. Many bass fishing-related injuries are the result of years of casting, flipping and reeling, with carpal tunnel syndrome, rotator cuff tears and “tennis elbow” (epicondylitis) being especially common. Florida pro Jesse Tacoronte’s most career-threatening injury occurred on the first day of his first Elite Series event at Cherokee Lake, Tennessee. “I slipped on the ice while getting out of my truck, fell like a ton of bricks and slammed my neck and shoulder on the pavement. It hurt like hell, but I managed to make it through the tournament.” As the weeks wore on and Tacoronte continued competing on the 2017 Elite schedule, the pain grew progressively worse. “It reached a point where my injury was severely limiting my range of motion, and driving my boat was sheer misery. I managed to complete the 2017 season, but my doctors said I needed surgery and recovery time, so I requested, and was granted, a medical leave from the 2018 season.” It took two surgeries and a bucket full of hardware to repair the damage to Tacoronte’s neck and

An early spring cold front can knock bass for a loop. Patience and a squarebill crankbait helped Tacoronte wake up the bass.

Photos: Don Wirth

DOTL Challenge: Put a Bassmaster pro on a small lake he's never seen before. Give him seven hours to locate and catch bass while we log his every move.



Date: March 19, 2019

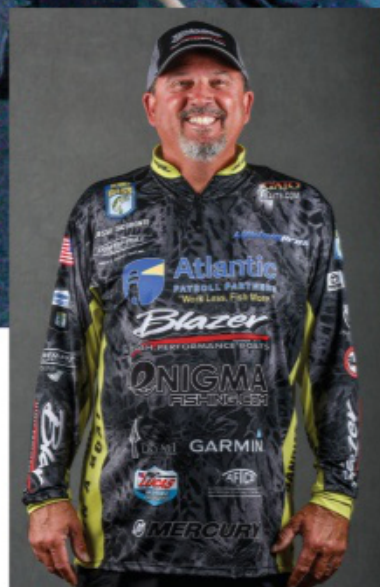
Venue: Lake R, a small reservoir

Water: 51 to 54 degrees, murky

Weather: Cold front, sunny, high of 55 degrees

Pro: Jesse Tacoronte, 51, Kissimmee, Fla. Tacoronte grew up in Las Vegas, where he fished local and regional bass tournaments. He later moved to Florida, where he ran a saltwater fishing charter and founded a tackle company, Enigma Fishing. In 2017, Tacoronte qualified for the Elite Series via the Bassmaster Opens, then had to take a medical leave for the 2018 season. He rejoined the Elite Series in 2019 and placed 18th at the February tournament on Lake Lanier (Georgia).

Boat: Blazer 625 Pro Elite with a 250-horsepower Evinrude outboard, Minn Kota trolling motor, Garmin electronics and twin Power-Pole shallow-water anchors



Day On The Lake Jesse Tacoronte



(Left) 8:34 a.m. Tacoronte flips a jig to laydowns on Lake R. (Above) 10:10 a.m. Tacoronte cranks a boat-house on Lake R.

Photos: Don Wirth

shoulder. “The docs removed four discs from my neck and put me back together using cadaver bone, four plates and 12 screws. Now, I’m finally back fishing the 2019 Elites and feeling fine. Dude, enough interviewing; let’s get this boat in the water! I’m ready to whack some bass!” If you’re ready to do the same, hop aboard with Tacoronte as he attacks Lake R on a frosty spring morning.

► **6:48 a.m.** It’s 30 degrees when we arrive at Lake R’s deserted launch ramp. Tacoronte pulls a selection of Enigma rods and reels from storage. “My son and I started Enigma Fishing in 2014. We manufacture top-quality, pro-level bass tackle and sell it direct to consumers via our website [enigmafishing.com] without the 40 to 60% markup typical of retail tackle outlets.”

7 HOURS LEFT

► **7 a.m.** We launch the Blazer. Tacoronte checks the lake temp: 51 degrees. “This region has had an extremely cold, rainy spring; I’m betting most of the bass here are still offshore. The water’s murky and we’re in a cold front, so the bite may be slow, especially this morning. Challenging conditions to be sure, but not impossible!”

► **7:08 a.m.** Tacoronte moves to a sloping bank near the ramp and makes his first casts of the day with a chartreuse/brown Rapala DT6 diving crankbait.

► **7:10 a.m.** He switches to a red craw Strike King One Kicker lipless crankbait and yo-yos it back to the boat. “In cold water, they’ll hit a lipless bait when it’s falling.”

► **7:13 a.m.** Tacoronte tries a shad-colored Megabass Vision 110 jerkbait off the sloping bank. “My reel is icing up. Why didn’t I schedule this #*%+ article for May?”

► **7:17 a.m.** Tacoronte tries a red craw Core Strike 2.5 squarebill crankbait on the sloping bank.

► **7:20 a.m.** We move to Lake R’s dam, where Tacoronte cranks the Core Strike around riprap.

► **7:26 a.m.** Tacoronte tries a 6-inch green pumpkin Zoom Trick Worm on a drop-shot rig and drags it in 18 feet of water off the dam. “I’m seeing a wad of fish down there on my electronics. Don’t know if they’re bass, however.”

► **7:34 a.m.** Tacoronte ties on a 3/4-ounce Picasso football jig, green pumpkin with matching Zoom trailer, and drags it across the bottom.

► **7:37 a.m.** He slice-casts the DT6 to the riprap but hauls water. “I’ve read all your articles about how much bass love rock cover in early spring. I think you’re a liar.”

► **7:46 a.m.** The riprap transitions into a clay bank as Tacoronte cranks the DT6.

► **7:51 a.m.** We move to a nearby bank littered with wood cover where Tacoronte cranks the squarebill.

► **7:55 a.m.** Tacoronte drags the football jig past a big fish he’s spotted on his graph. “If that’s a bass, it’s an absolute stud!”

6 HOURS LEFT

► **8:01 a.m.** Tacoronte resumes cranking the squarebill to shoreline wood.

► **8:14 a.m.** Adjusting to cold-front conditions, Tacoronte downsizes his Core Strike squarebill to a 1.5, then continues cranking shallow wood cover.

► **8:34 a.m.** Tacoronte flips a series of laydowns with a black and blue 1/2-ounce Picasso jig.

► **8:40 a.m.** He switches squarebill crankbaits to a chartreuse Strike King 1.5 and roots it around wood cover on a shallow point.

► **8:53 a.m.** Tacoronte enters a cove off the main lake and cranks a steep bank. “You notice how quiet it is? No birds chirping, no squirrels scurrying around — no bass moving, either! There was a full moon last night; in spring, the full moon often shuts everything down until the afternoon.”



5 HOURS LEFT

► **9 a.m.** Tacoronte bangs the chartreuse 1.5 off shallow stumps in the back of the cove. "They'll spawn back here if it ever warms up."

► **9:10 a.m.** Tacoronte runs across the lake and spots an offshore ledge loaded with fish on his electronics. He drags the drop-shot worm and football jig around the structure.

► **9:27 a.m.** He ties on a big Bass Munitions swim-bait rigged with an underspin blade and slow rolls it around the ledge.

► **9:31 a.m.** Tacoronte retrieves a 3/4-ounce shad-pattern Yo-Zuri Rattl'n Vibe lipless crankbait across the ledge. "Bass are suspended everywhere out here!"

(Above) **11:40 a.m.** Tacoronte's first keeper largemouth of the day, 1 pound, hit a squarebill crankbait on a main-lake point. (Right) **11:56 a.m.** Tacoronte bags a 2-2 largemouth off a main-lake point.

► **9:42 a.m.** Unable to score a fish off the ledge, Tacoronte moves 100 yards to a rocky point and cranks the chartreuse 1.5. He dredges up a wad of old fishing line and stashes it in his cooler.

► **9:50 a.m.** He drags a black and blue Trick Worm on a Carolina rig across the point.

4 HOURS LEFT

► **10 a.m.** Tacoronte moves back to the ledge and drags a generic smoke-colored Ned-rig worm around a school of fish. No takers. "When they won't hit a

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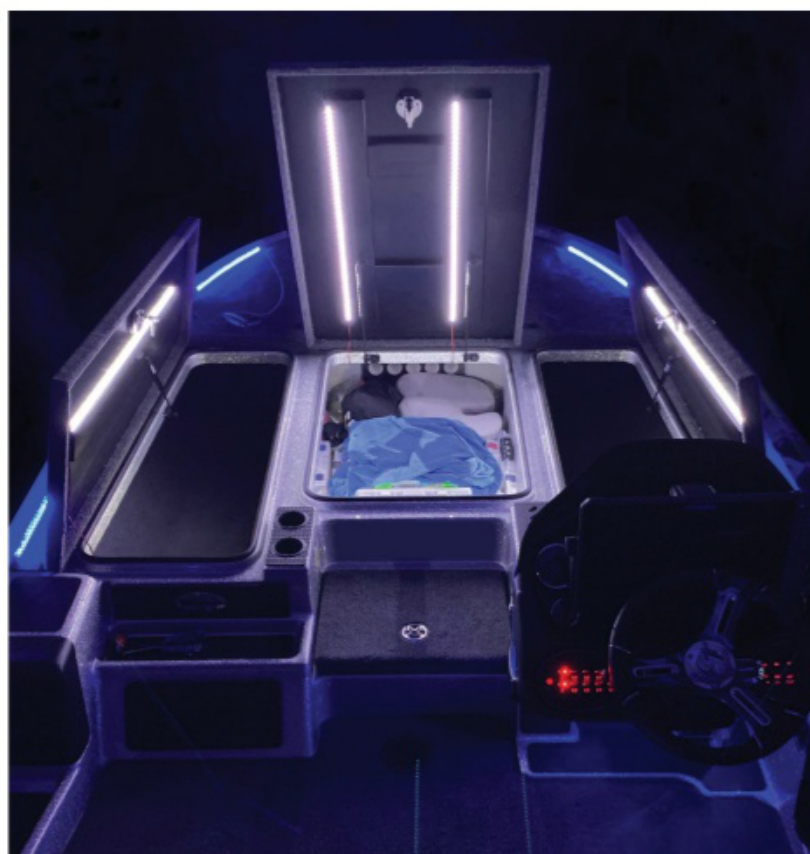


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Ned rig, you know they've got a serious case of lockjaw."

► **10:10 a.m.** Tacoronte vacates the ledge and cranks a nearby boathouse with the chartreuse 1.5. "Hopefully, this'll catch that one big, stupid 9-pounder that's moved up shallow."

► **10:16 a.m.** He cranks a chunk rock bank with the 1.5. No luck here, either.

► **10:21 a.m.** Tacoronte ties on a white 1/2-ounce Norris bladed jig with a matching swimbait trailer. "I picked up several of these baits in Japan a few years ago and have caught a ton of bass on them. You can't find them here in the U.S." He retrieves the vibrating bait parallel to a seawall.

► **10:30 a.m.** Tacoronte has fished his way into a shallow cove with the bladed jig. What's his take on the day so far? "Cold-front conditions and that big old March moon [are] keeping the bass offshore and inactive. It's warming up a bit, however, and I'm expecting the bite to improve this afternoon, hopefully before my time runs out. I'm not giving up yet on throwing moving baits to shallow cover because the first fish to move to the banks in early spring are often the biggest, and I could tie into a giant.

Another iffy factor is the sunlight: These fish have gotten accustomed to week after week of cloudy, rainy weather, and this bright sun may actually be knocking them down rather than perking them up."

► **10:36 a.m.** Tacoronte catches his first bass of the day, a 10-inch largemouth, off a seawall on the bladed jig. "At last! Some feedback!"

► **10:55 a.m.** Tacoronte has fished his way toward the mouth of the cove with the bladed jig. He cranks his outboard and idles toward a long rock point while downing a sandwich.

3 HOURS LEFT

► **11 a.m.** Tacoronte hops and drags the Ned worm across the point. "Same deal here as on that ledge — I'm seeing scores of bass suspended in deep water."

► **11:08 a.m.** He tries the big swimbait on the point. Again, no takers.

► **11:14 a.m.** Tacoronte moves to a rocky shoreline and tries the bladed jig.

► **11:16 a.m.** The bladed jig wedges between deep rocks. Tacoronte struggles to free it but finally breaks off the lure. "Crap, I've only got a couple of those left and I'd have to fly back to Japan to find some more!" He replaces it with a white Bass Pro Shops bladed jig/trailer. "This'll have to do for now."

► **11:25 a.m.** Tacoronte continues down the rocky bank. An east wind is now compounding the bass'



1:54 a.m. With minutes remaining, Tacoronte bags his biggest bass of the day, 3 pounds, 1 ounce, off a main-lake point. Photo: Don Wirth

inactivity. "I really hate fishing a shaky head worm, but I may have to."

► **11:33 a.m.** Tacoronte races uplake to a long mud point and drags the football jig across the structure.

► **11:40 a.m.** Tacoronte catches his first keeper of the day, 1 pound, off the point on the Strike King 1.5. "Yes! A keeper! At least I didn't get skunked!"

► **11:44 a.m.** Tacoronte drenches a 3/4-ounce black and blue Picasso football jig and its matching Zoom trailer with

Megastrike fish attractant, then flings it across the point. "I'm feeling both rock and brush down there. What's not to like?"

► **11:56 a.m.** Tacoronte cranks up his second keeper, 2 pounds, 2 ounces, off the point on the 1.5. "I felt it tick a little piece of brush and he nailed it."

2 HOURS LEFT

► **12:01 p.m.** Tacoronte casts the Ned rig worm to the point and catches keeper No. 3, 1 pound, 5 ounces. "They're waking up! I swear I just heard a bird chirp!"

► **12:20 p.m.** No more love on the point, so Tacoronte runs to a shaded bank and cranks the Core Strike squarebill. "Too shallow here."

► **12:35 p.m.** Tacoronte races to a sloping bank with laydowns and cranks a root beer/chartreuse Bomber 200 diver.

► **12:41 p.m.** He moves back to the point where he bagged three keepers and bumps the Bandit across the structure.

► **12:43 p.m.** Tacoronte reverts to the chartreuse 1.5 and catches his fourth keeper, 1 pound, 1 ounce. "They can't all be the same size in this lake. Surely there's a big one out there somewhere!"

► **12:50 p.m.** Tacoronte whacks his fifth keeper, 1 pound, 6 ounces, on the 1.5. "If this were an MLF tournament, I'd be leading the pack!"

► **12:52 p.m.** Tacoronte cranks a parrot-pattern Bandit 200 around a nearby rockpile.

1 HOUR LEFT

► **1:03 p.m.** Tacoronte runs to a ledge that drops quickly from 5 to 17 feet. He cranks the structure with the Bandit.

► **1:08 p.m.** He roots the chartreuse 1.5 around a shallow flat. "You'd think a few fish might have moved up shallow, but you'd be wrong."

► **1:16 p.m.** Tacoronte races into a small cove downlake and cranks the chartreuse 1.5 around shoreline laydowns.

► **1:35 p.m.** He tries the 1.5 on a steep channel bank. “Screw this; I’m spending the rest of my time on that mud point.”

► **1:40 p.m.** Back on the point, Tacoronte jerks the Megabass 110 and bags his sixth keeper, 1-4. “I be cullin’ now!”

► **1:44 p.m.** Keeper No. 7, 2-1, succumbs to the 110 on the point. “I’m jerking it twice, then making a long pause. They’re hitting it on a slack line.”

► **1:45 p.m.** Tacoronte catches keeper No. 8, 1-1, on his next cast with the jerkbait.

► **1:46 p.m.** A better fish whacks the jerkbait; Tacoronte goes to swing it aboard, but it comes unbuttoned. “Dang it, that was a 3-pounder.”

► **1:50 p.m.** With 10 minutes remaining, Tacoronte catches keeper No. 9, 1 pound, on the jerkbait.

► **1:54 p.m.** Tacoronte’s line tightens and he sticks his 10th keeper and biggest fish of the day, 3 pounds, 1 ounce, on the jerkbait. “I could probably sit here all afternoon catching them like this, but it’s time to go!”

► **2 p.m.** Time’s up. Tacoronte had a slow start to his day on Lake R, but it ended with a flurry of 10

WHERE AND WHEN JESSE TACORONTE CAUGHT HIS FIVE BIGGEST BASS

- 1** 2 pounds, 2 ounces; main-lake point; chartreuse Strike King 1.5 crankbait; 11:56 a.m.
- 2** 1 pound, 5 ounces; same place as No. 1; generic Ned worm; 12:01 p.m.
- 3** 1 pound, 6 ounces; same place No. 1; same lure as No. 1; 12:50 p.m.
- 4** 2 pounds, 1 ounce; same place as No. 1; Megabass Vision 110 jerkbait; 1:44 p.m.
- 5** 3 pounds, 1 ounce; same place as No. 1; same lure as No. 4; 1:54 p.m.

TOTAL: 9 POUNDS, 15 OUNCES

keeper bass; the five biggest weigh 9 pounds, 15 ounces.

The Day in Perspective

“This cold front had the fish in a stupor all morning, but like I predicted, they woke up after noon,” Tacoronte told *Bassmaster*. “There are tons of bass sitting offshore in this lake just waiting to move shallow, but it’s going to take a few warm days to raise that water temp. If I were to fish here tomorrow under these same conditions, I’d sleep in till 9 a.m., go get a big breakfast, then hit the water about noon and fish till dark!”



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A professional bass fisherman, Brandon Lester, is shown in a blue and yellow Mustad fishing boat. He is wearing a dark grey rain jacket with a blue hood and a blue and white Mustad cap. He is standing and reeling in a large bass fish. The boat has various sponsor logos, including 'Mustad', 'Mud Hole', and 'MHX'. Another person is visible in the background, also in a fishing boat. The scene is set on a body of water with a forested background.

Identifying the feeding windows
of bass and learning how to
exploit them is one reason
Elite Series pro Brandon Lester
is becoming a superstar
of the sport



How To Time the Bite

By **STEVE PRICE**
SENIOR WRITER

WHENEVER BRANDON LESTER is having a slow day on the water, he fortifies himself with the belief that “they’re always biting somewhere, and all I have to do is find that ‘somewhere.’” Over his tournament career, the Bassmaster Elite Series pro has found that “somewhere” often enough to convince himself that being in the right place can be just a matter of correct timing.

“I absolutely believe bass have daily feeding times, feeding windows that open throughout the day,” emphasizes the Elite pro, “and what a fisherman has to do is learn to recognize when one of those windows opens. Although a feeding window might be lake-wide under certain weather conditions, more times than not that ‘somewhere’ I’m looking for will be a small group of fish in a specific place.”

For decades, anglers have tried to solve the mystery of how to establish specific feeding times for bass so they could be there when it happens. Even Dr. James Henshall raised the question in his famous work *The Book of the Black Bass*, first published in 1881. Some fishermen plan their outings around solunar tables, charts that theoretically forecast feeding activity periods for fish and wildlife based on different moon phases and the position of the moon (and sun) in relation to the earth.

As a full-time tournament pro, on the water regardless of what the solunar tables predict, Lester doesn’t pay any attention to them. What he has recognized, however, is that there are certain factors a bass fisherman can learn to recognize that may lead him to being in the right place when bass are feeding.

“I think the very first step is understanding the quality of the fishery you’re on,” he says. “As long as you’re catching fish, you know you’re around them, but on the Sabine River, for example, you’re not going to get nearly as many bites as you’re going to get on the St. Lawrence. If you get two bites fairly quickly in a certain area on the Sabine, you’re probably on to something, but two quick bites on the St. Lawrence isn’t enough to tell you that.

“When larger populations are present, there is more competition between the bass to grab a bait, so not only is it easier to find that ‘somewhere’ we’re talking about, but also easier to identify when it’s happening because you’ll get more bites.”

Another way Lester identifies a possible feeding window is by paying attention to what’s happening in the water, in the air and on land around him. He believes everything in nature works together, so even if he does not actually see bass, he looks for other activity. He knows when he sees a blue heron land and begin stalking the shoreline, when squirrels scamper down tree trunks looking for acorns or gulls start diving, that nature’s dinner bell might be ringing.

How To Time the Bite

“Feeding windows do not happen the same time every day, either,” he points out, “but I do know the early morning and late afternoon hours are always good times to be fishing. There seems to be some feeding activity occurring, and it may last two to three hours, but I tend to believe this is more about lower light levels that make the bass feel safer than anything else.

“I remember during the 2018 Elite event on the St. Lawrence [where he finished third with 94 pounds, 1 ounce], there definitely was an early morning bite occurring in the area I was fishing, but it was not going on everywhere along the river. Several competitors fishing near me also reported catching their fish early, but overall, most of the field who were fishing in other areas caught their bass later in the day.

“I can’t really explain what was going on there on the St. Lawrence, and it’s certainly not the only time I’ve had my best success during the early morning hours. Earlier in the 2018 Elite season at Grand Lake where I finished sixth, I caught the majority of my weight before 11 a.m., and on the second day there I caught the biggest stringer I’ve ever weighed in, 26-3, nearly all of which came in the first several hours of the morning.”

Although Lester likes his chances better during the early morning hours, he also knows that during the winter months on bright, sunny days, the afternoon bite from about 2 p.m. until dark will be better. This is not so much specifically about feeding, he believes, as it is about the water warming slightly and bass moving and setting up where they will feed if a lure is dropped in front of them. Boat docks, grassbeds, logs and other pieces of cover become prime afternoon targets that never draw a strike in the early morning hours.

“Bass can have more than one feeding period a day, especially in the summer,” he explains, “because they’re simply more active. During the winter, I don’t believe fish feed as often. Again, this is why it’s important to know the lake you’re fishing.



Lester believes you can create a feeding window if you are around enough bass and have the patience to cast to the school repeatedly without a bite. Once the first fish gives in, the competition factor takes over and other bass in the school will quickly commit. Photo: Seigo Saito

“Even though baitfish move quite a bit during a day, they are not always the primary catalyst that initiates a bass feeding period. At certain times of the year and in some lakes during the summer, baitfish definitely can trigger feeding, and I always believe that if you do see baitfish activity, bass aren’t far away. That’s when you can sometimes trigger a feeding spree with your lures.”

The Elite pro believes it is easier to trigger a feeding bite where there is a group of fish, as opposed to just one or two individuals. He has experienced times when he made repeated casts to a promising spot for 20 to 30 minutes without getting a strike, then after he finally did get a bass to bite, he’d start catching them on every cast.

“It might just have been the angle of my cast or a slightly erratic move the lure made,” Lester says, smiling, “or that the fish just got tired of seeing the bait swim past him that made it finally strike. Sometimes you just don’t know.

“Lures that have the best potential to start bass biting are reaction-style lures like squarebills and other crankbaits that deflect off cover or the bottom, ChatterBait-style lures, spinnerbaits and even topwaters that you can walk fast over the surface. You’re really not looking for a feeding strike, but rather, you’re just trying to get a reaction, and once one bass commits like that, it ignites the competition in the rest of the school.”

Another element to look for that frequently starts bass feeding is water movement, especially when it starts suddenly, such as when an upstream

dam begins releasing water. Learning when this is going to happen is simply a matter of making a telephone call to the dam, and it can be critical to your fishing because bass react very quickly to current flow.

“If you’re in clear water, you may actually see bass moving to ambush locations, such as current breaks, rockpiles, even log jams,” notes Lester. “Bass want a place out of the direct flow of the current but still close to it where they can dart out and grab food as it washes by. The number of bass that have been caught by fishermen letting their jigs wash downstream in the current past little breaks like this is uncountable.”

Timing a feeding bite for larger bass, both largemouth and smallmouth, is much more difficult, since larger bass do not feed as often and are not normally in large schools. Although incredible feeding sprees do occur and create lifelong memories for anglers lucky enough to be present, many trophy bass guides recommend sitting quietly in a potential feeding area near a depth change and just fishing much, much more slowly. Being on the edges of current breaks, like Lester fished on the St. Lawrence, is a good option.

“Overall,” the Elite pro concludes, “we really don’t know that much about exactly why bass feed when they do. We just know certain things do seem to open a feeding window, and bass fisherman can take advantage of some of them. Bass are going to be feeding somewhere, and it’s definitely possible to find that ‘somewhere.’”



Early Spring's

Big 3

By **STEVE PRICE**
SENIOR WRITER

Elite Series pro Lee Livesay cut his teeth on Lake Fork's double-digit bass during different stages of the prespawn. Adopt his strategies to catch a wallhanger of your own

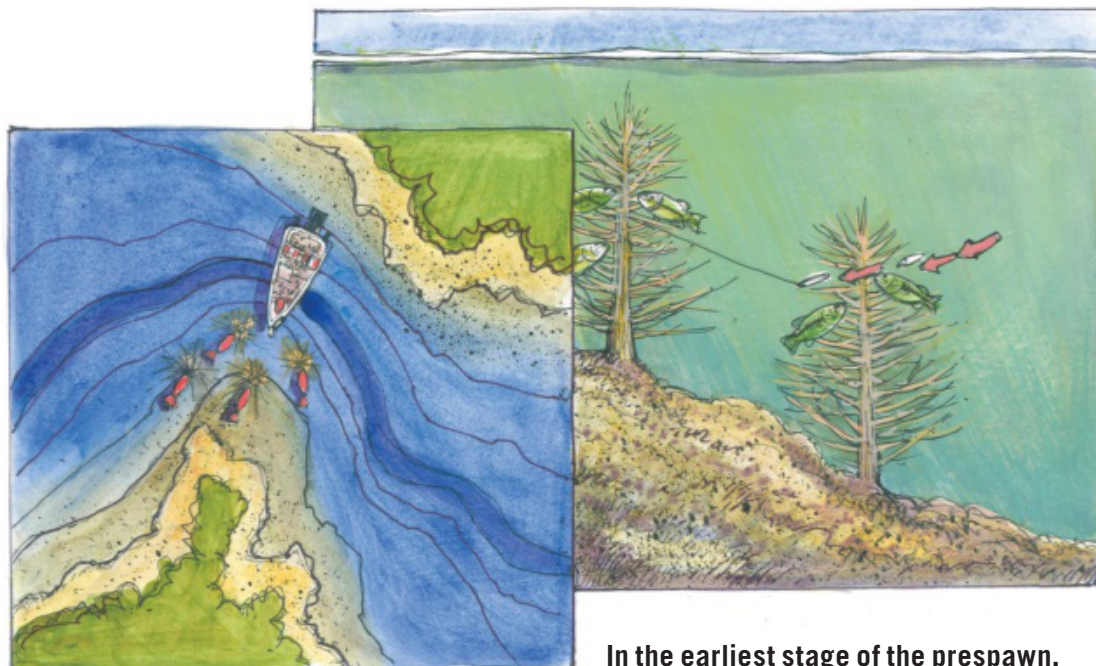
IN SOME YEARS, spring comes early to Lake Fork. Bass start staging in early December, even though the water temperature on the east Texas impoundment will still be in the low 50s and may stay that way for the next several months. On especially bad days, the air temperature will be frigid and snow might be falling.

That's the way Bassmaster Elite Series pro Lee Livesay likes it, because he often has the lake to himself that time of year. He's been guiding on Fork for seven years, and on these "bad" days, he rarely fails to connect with at least one 7-pounder. One day last year, he and a client boated three 9-pounders and the next day caught one over 11 pounds. It's no wonder these weeks of early spring, as rough as the weather might be, are Livesay's favorite part of the year.

“Early spring is one of those transition periods that’s difficult to define in terms of a specific timetable,” notes Livesay. “Generally, I think of early spring as the time when bass move from winter habitat until just before they go on spawning beds. On Fork, this can last from December to February, and of course it’s later the further north you go, but I have seen bass start moving to prespawn staging areas as early as November.”

“What’s important for fishermen to realize is that bass can and do move very quickly during this time of year. Water temperature and water clarity are important factors, but when you’ve been catching fish on one pattern and it ends abruptly, you can pretty well guess the bass have moved to a different location and entered another phase of the prespawn season.”

In his years of fishing at Fork, as well as in his tournament fishing on lakes around the country, Livesay has come to rely on three basic early spring patterns that produce quality fishing and reliable results. They seldom produce a lot of fish during an eight-hour day, but more often than not, they produce larger, better-than-average bass. One February day, he and a client, alternating between two different spots in Fork’s Dale Creek, culled down to five bass weighing just under 44 pounds.



In the earliest stage of the prespawn, Livesay will target bass hanging in submerged trees on points. A jerkbait or small swimbait gets the nod here.

Illustrations: Doug Schermer

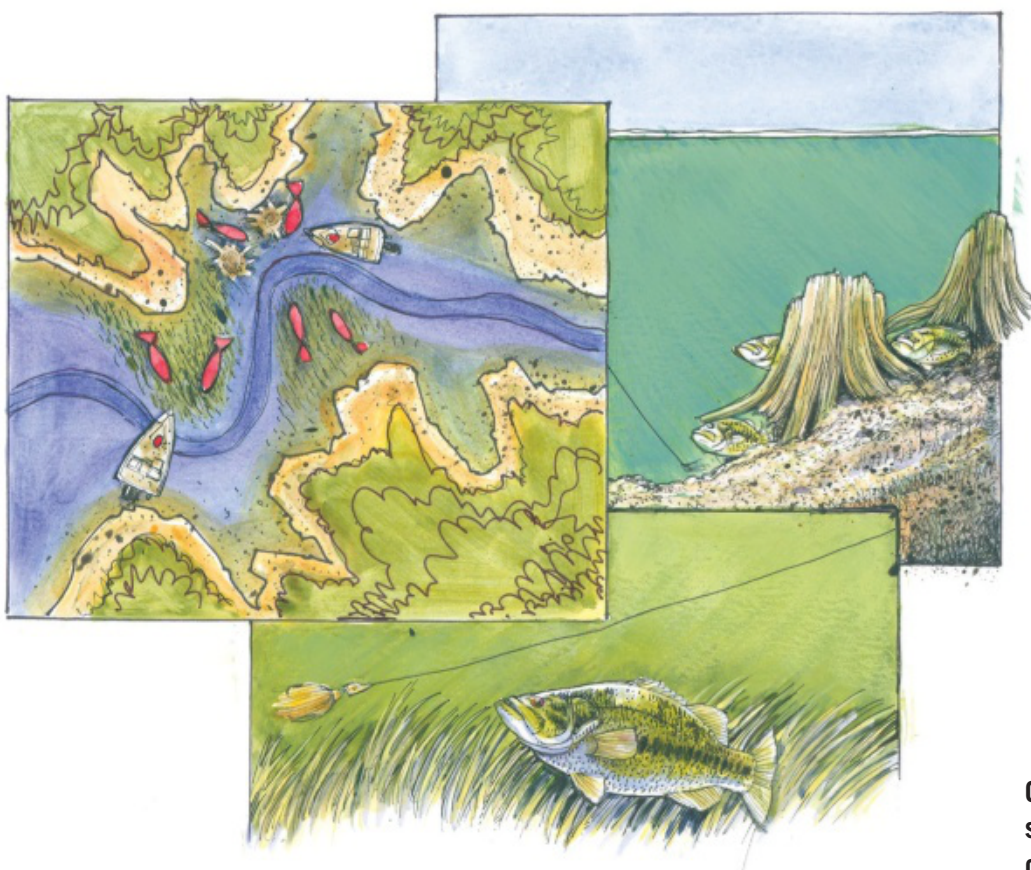
Those five and the others they caught that day came from the outside bends of channel swings, one of Livesay’s three go-to patterns. The other two early spring patterns he uses include slow-twitching jerkbaits on main-lake and secondary points in major creeks, and swimming jigs over submerged vegetation on big flats. Throughout this entire prespawn season, he rarely fishes deeper than 15 feet, and frequently he’s in water as shallow as 5 feet.

“The first pattern I look for this time of year is for bass that are suspended in trees on main-lake points and secondary points on the southern end of a lake,” Livesay explains. “The more isolated the trees, the better, and it seems like the very best trees are often on a point heading into a major creek. This is when the water is coldest but it’s also clear. The key is finding underwater timber in about 10 to 14 feet of water. Any type of timber will attract these bass, but cedars are my favorite because they have so many limbs.”

“Most of the time, bass will be suspended just 6 to 8 feet down in those limbs. They’re almost dormant, but they will feed on big gizzard shad, especially if there is just a little wind. Sometimes you can pull up to a tree and get four or five bites, and other days you may visit the same tree three times during the day and not get a single strike. On your fourth visit, you might catch a 9, an 8 and a 7 in just as many casts. There will usually also be trees in deeper water, but they’re almost never as productive.”

Livesay’s two favorite lures are a Spro McStick jerkbait in a shad pattern and a Keitech swimbait (keitechusa.com) in Tennessee shad color. Livesay describes his retrieve as jerk, jerk, p-a-u-s-e, and he’s used it with good results on Table Rock, where many of the bluff points have cedar trees. He believes the bass he’s catching this way are the earliest fish starting to stage on their way toward shallower spawning beds.

Once the bass move out of the deep trees, Livesay will look for shallower channel swings near the backs of tributaries. If stumps or wood are present, even better. He’ll drag a jig for bites.





Just before bass move up to make beds, Livesay catches them on grass flats near shallow spawning sites. He likes to rip a lipless bait or slow roll a bladed jig over the greenery.

From the underwater trees, Livesay moves to midlake tributaries, where he concentrates on channel swings in the back halves of those tributaries. Both the inside and outside edges of the channel can attract bass, especially if big stumps or laydowns are present. Any vegetation, especially grass on the inside of the channel swing, will make the spot even more attractive to the fish, but “big wood” — the gnarliest cover he can find — is the first thing Livesay looks for.

“The fish are normally right on the very edge of these channels,” the Elite pro explains, “and I usually start fishing in the 14- to 18-foot range and slowly move up to water that may be only 4 to 6 feet deep. Sometimes I’ll catch some bass on the outside of the channel swing in the 14-foot range and others shallower on the inside edge.

“I use a 1/2-ounce black/blue Santone flipping jig rigged with 20-pound Hi-Seas fluorocarbon line for the stumps and laydowns, and a lipless crankbait or a vibrating jig on the inside edges in shallower water. The biggest stumps are generally in deeper water and will have exposed roots, really bad stuff, and a 1/2-ounce jig comes through them pretty well if you’re careful. A heavier 3/4- or 1-ounce jig will simply stay snagged all the time. I let the jig fall to the bottom, lift it up slightly and shake it, then let it fall again. If I don’t get a hit, I’ll lift it a little higher and shake it some more, then let it fall again. If the stumps are fairly shallow, I’ll pitch or flip to one side, shake the bait, then flip to the other side, shake it and move on.”

From the channel swings, bass move to flats with submerged hydrilla or milfoil, sometimes in water less than 6 feet deep. That’s because the water temperature, perhaps 51 or 52 degrees in the channels, may be 2 to 4 degrees warmer over the aquatic vegetation. Livesay prefers to fish the northern end of the lake at this time, looking for flats protected from the weather. These flats may be on the backside of a secondary point or simply a flat in the very back of a creek close to where the fish are going to spawn. The water should be clear, and the bass might be feeding on crawfish, bream or late-afternoon shad.

Livesay’s lure choices here include lipless crankbaits, vibrating jigs and swim jigs. With the lipless crankbait, he reels fast enough to keep the bait just touching the top of the vegetation, and when it does get snagged, he rips it out hard. This is a very basic

early spring presentation, and countless tournaments have been won on grass-filled lakes like Rayburn and Toledo Bend with this technique.

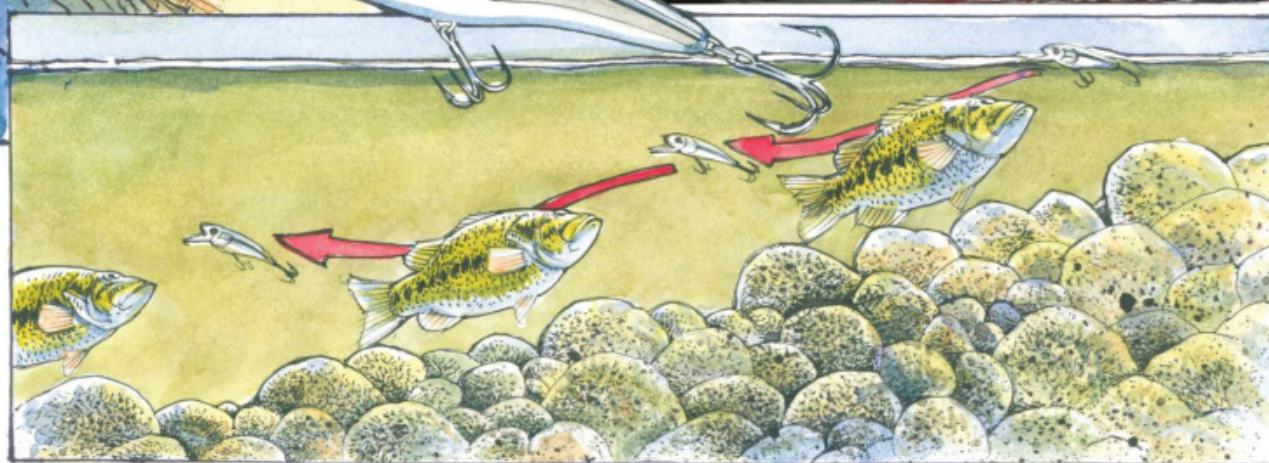
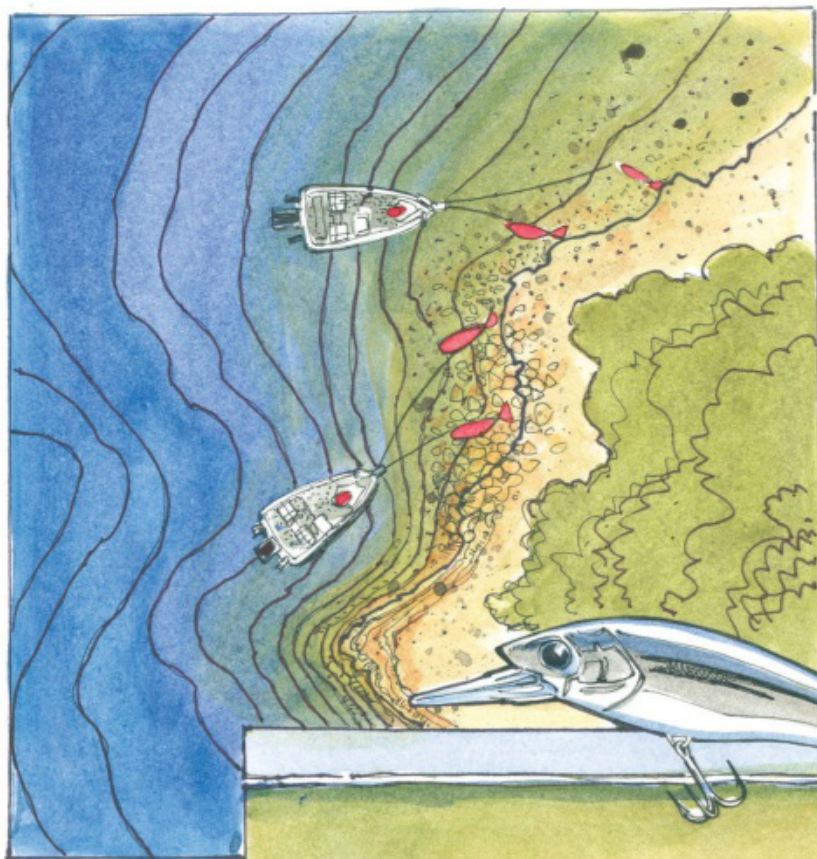
“If the fast retrieve with the crankbait doesn’t work, or the grass is too deep, I’ll change to a vibrating jig,” Livesay continues, “but I’ll fish it a little slower over the top of the grass. Again, I’ll rip it out if it gets snagged. I think it’s that sudden, erratic movement that triggers the strikes. Late in the afternoon, if it’s a sunny day and I’m fishing really thick grass, I’ll usually switch to a swimming jig, because this is when shad might be more active. I reel it straight back like a swimbait, without any stop-and-go or jerking, to try to imitate those shad.”

Each of these three patterns can be productive in water temperatures up to about 55 degrees, notes the Lake Fork guide, and there are days when he has actually fished all three in the same day, depending on the weather. He may start on the points in the morning, move to the channel swings after a lunch break for his clients, then go to the flats in late afternoon.

“After water temperatures climb into the 55- to 57-degree range, bass migrate from the flats to their spawning beds,” says Livesay, “and you’ll usually know when it happens because action on the flats will really slow down. There will still be some bass out there, along with others on the channels and points that are still coming in, but bass often move in groups, which is why things can change so quickly. They’ll be feeding on the flats one day and on beds the next.”

As the Elite pro has described, the early spring season varies from region to region, according to the water temperature. Once the water temperatures reach about 50 degrees, and with these three fishing pattern choices, you can actually follow the bass as they move into the shallows, even when spring does come early.





Battering The Bluffs With Chad Pipkens

Transitions dominate spring fishing and spring weather, but Chad Pipkens has a surefire way to catch 'em, come hell or high water

Chad Pipkens makes no bones about it: Put this pattern on a highland reservoir in the springtime, and it's going to pay off. The Michigan native is so adamant about it that he scoffed at the need for a backup pattern. And who are we to argue? Pipkens is closing in on his 100th B.A.S.S. tournament, and he's boated about half a million dollars in competition to boot.

His strategy starts with a diminutive jerkbait and some oversized hooks.

"Spring is all about changing conditions," begins Pipkens. "It's about being able to make adjustments as a day goes on, or two days go by and the weather gets just right. For me, that means fishing nature's transitions. I'm talking about bluffs that taper off from steep ledges to chunk rock to pea gravel. With

[Tackle Tips]

Rod: 6-foot, 10-inch Swate Extra Fast Action Medium Power Black Label Casting Rod

Reel: Abu Garcia 8.0:1 MGX Casting Reel

Line: 10- to 12-pound Sunline Sniper FC Fluorocarbon



Pipkens employs not only a small jerkbait that suspends or sinks slowly, but also a lot of patience when targeting bluffs in the spring.

Illustrations: Doug Schermer, Photo: Seigo Saito

this pattern, you can hit the water, look for those and hook up."

To get started, Pipkens harnesses a Damiki Abyss 90, a slightly undersized jerkbait with a wobbling action that dives to between 7 and 8 feet then suspends. He hooks up a split ring, scraps the rear factory hook in favor of a TroKar 300-3X wide gap treble and sets off in search of his prey. "The easiest way to find a spot to fish is with your eyes. That's the great thing about this pattern. You don't need to do a lot of graphing to fish it. I would go to a creek arm and start looking for bluffs. Eventually, there will be a bend when that bluff starts to turn to chunk rock, and that rock is really good in the spring."

Pipkens positions his boat at a 45-degree angle from the rock, making casts towards the bank from about 30 yards. The fish, he says, will be watching. A splash near the bank may catch their eye. From there, you wait ... 10, 12, even 15 seconds at times, without making a move.

"It's all about making sure your bait is in the strike zone," says Pipkens. "If they are active and chasing bait, that zone may be bigger, but

[The Pro]

Chad Pipkens

Total B.A.S.S. tournaments: 97

Total career weight: 2,920 pounds, 13 ounces

Total career earnings: \$493,418

Highest finish: 1st place, 2014 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Northern Open, Lake St. Clair



oftentimes they are really lethargic and you have to wait.”

For the most part, Pipkens prefers to keep his boat as far away from his target areas as reasonably possible. However, he will come up tight to cover like laydowns to gain better control of the bait in precarious positions. Either way, he’s engaged in a waiting game that you’ll need to replicate for maximum success.

If a fish hits, you’ll know soon enough. If not, make a twitch or two and keep at ‘em.

Because of this technique’s repetitive snatching motion, you’ll want to partner your jerkbait with a relatively lightweight rod. Throw a heavy-action rod all day like this, and you’ll likely wear your arms out quickly. Cast. Wait. Wait some more. Twitch. Twitch. Repeat.

This strategy may seem counterintuitive to some bass anglers. After all, we often fish for these green and brown bass because they’re an action-packed breed. But, Pipkens says if you put on your

thinking cap, the tactic makes sense. “If you think about shad when they are dying off, a lot of times they just sit straight up in the water without moving. When your lure suspends, (bass) are drawn to it. The lack of action actually is the action. You have to slow yourself down and make two or three casts at a target when you’re doing this. It can be painfully slow at times.”

Jerkbait fishing — especially the slow, methodical type that Pipkens preaches here — is one of the most suspenseful ways to spend a day on the water. Think of it like watching a spy thriller rather than a blockbuster action film.

“When you are cranking, you feel contact with the bait most of the time. You feel the bite most of the time. With a jerkbait, though, you actually get two different bites out of one bait. Sometimes, you go to move the bait and they pull the rod out of your hand as you snap it. Other times, you get that bite when your line is

“When your lure suspends, [bass] are drawn to it. The lack of action actually is the action.”

slack, and all of a sudden your line zips up and you visibly watch the line jump and tighten. That is its own kind of excitement.”

Color-wise, Pipkens prefers a shad-tinted bait with water clarity in the 3- to 5-foot range. If it’s farther than that, like the 10- or 12-foot visibility at places like Table Rock, he’ll dial up a jerkbait with a translucent belly. Either way, he swears that this pattern’s success is heavily dependent on the balance of the bait. “Every jerkbait seems to suspend differently,” he says. “It doesn’t matter what manufacturer. I’ve had many versions of the same bait that sink a little or rise a little, and I definitely don’t want anything to do with the rising. To a bass, that’s unnatural. So, when I am replacing my hooks, I make sure to check the bait and make sure it suspends perfectly or just sinks very slightly, because the action is so subtle. But most importantly, it works.”

[Weather]

Perfect Mostly Sunny With Light Winds A breeze will help break up the water’s surface, while the sun will warm waters and help make fish more active. Low pressure is ideal.



Worth A Shot

Flat Calm

Glassy conditions with high barometric pressure and zero clouds will tighten the screws some on this pattern. You should still be able to catch them, but expect to play the waiting game.

Change It Up

High Winds, Stormy

The tougher things get, the more patient you’ll have to be with the jerkbait. In nasty conditions, the fish will still bite this pattern, but they may break your heart with nips and follows rather than committed bites. When this happens, time to change your presentation altogether.



[On Deck]

When waters are warmer, Chad Pipkens keeps a squarebill crankbait on deck — not because the jerkbait won’t work, he says, but because the ‘bill is a more efficient way to boat bass in those conditions. If you find yourself on the back end of several consecutive warm days, try moving past the pea gravel and into the first shallow, rounded pocket off of a point. There, Pipkens says you’re likely to find some brush or logs, a feasting ground for the squarebill. Pipkens prefers a Damiki Brute, which runs between 4 and 5 feet. He pairs the Brute with a 6-foot, 10-inch medium power Swate Mad Crankenist rod and 14-pound Sunline FC fluorocarbon.



Spinning Savvy For Spring



1 [Make Spinning Life Easier]

Bassmaster Elite Series pros rely on spinning gear in a surprisingly wide array of water and cover conditions. In spring, they'll use it to catch suspending smallmouth and spotted bass in clear, rocky reservoirs, as well as lethargic lunker largemouth in brushy, muddy lakes. Here are some inside tips for using spinning gear more effectively this spring.

Managing Line Twist

By far the biggest complaint both professional and weekend anglers have with spinning gear is line twist, which invariably leads to knots, tangles and line "bird nesting," or jumping off the spool in a springy mess. There is no way to totally eliminate spinning reel line twist, but Bassmaster Elite Series pros recommend taking the following steps to minimize it.

1. Spool your spinning reels with braided line. Braid

is limp, low diameter, has almost no spool memory (coiling) and behaves beautifully on spinning reels. To reduce presentation visibility in clear lakes, attach an 8- to 10-foot fluorocarbon leader to the braided main line using an Albright knot (see animatedknots.com/albright-knot for tying instructions).

2. When spooling spinning reels with monofilament or fluorocarbon line, make sure the line exits the filler spool in a counterclockwise fashion as you wind it on the reel

spool in a clockwise fashion, and don't fill the reel more than 1/8 inch from the edge of the spool.

3. Close the reel's bail by hand after each cast instead of with the reel handle.

4. When fighting a fish, adjust the reel drag so you're not trying to reel in line while the drag is slipping excessively.

5. Spray your spinning reel spool liberally with a commercial line treatment to relax the line and reduce spool memory.

2 [Where To Cast]

Rapidly changing spring weather patterns often give bass lockjaw, but pros know that switching to smaller, more natural lures and spinning tackle can usually garner them enough bites to put them in the money. Here are three spring spinning patterns they highly recommend.



Docks During Cold Fronts

On blustery bluebird days, bass suspending under docks are often reluctant to hit a bulky, fast-sinking lure. Skip a 1/8-ounce finesse jig or a wacky-rigged 4-inch worm under the dock; its slow, natural fall will entice sluggish lunkers to bite.



45-Degree Rock Banks

Prespawn bass in clear lakes will suspend off these sloping structures. Cast a 3- to 4-inch swimbait on a 1/8-ounce jighead parallel to the bank, let it sink 5 to 10 feet, then reel slowly while gently shaking the rod tip.



Tributary Points

On windy days, reservoir bass often gang up on points at the mouths of feeder creeks prior to moving shallow to spawn. Grinding a small crankbait around the point on spinning gear can produce a quick limit.



3 [Shopping List]

Not sure what to add to your spinning gear arsenal? Well, we have you covered. These items are must-haves for the spinning enthusiast and will no doubt help you get more bites.

A VMC Drop Dead Weighted Hook

This is a great hook for fishing soft jerkbaits, stick-worms or small swimbaits on spinning tackle. They are available in 3/32- to 1/8-ounce weights and 3/0 to 5/0 sizes. Each pack contains four hooks. \$3.79 (rapala.com)

D Blakemore Real Magic

If you spool your spinning reels with either fluorocarbon or monofilament, you're going to have line memory, which leads to twisting, which leads to cussing. Spraying Real Magic on the spooled line relaxes both those pesky line coils and your nerves. \$9.49 (ttiblakemore.com)

B Sufix Nanobraid

This is the braid you want for long-casting spinning applications, like shaky heads or small crankbaits. It features wide angle braiding technology that is silky smooth. It provides excellent knot strength when paired with a fluorocarbon leader. 10-pound test/150 yards. \$19.69 (Rapala.com)

E St. Croix Mojo Glass Bass Spinning Rod

This is likely the only spinning rod you will find designed to throw small crankbaits. Made of 100% premium fiberglass, the 7-foot, 2-inch rod can cast a Shad Rap a city block and ensure the fish stays hooked. \$149.99 (stcroixrods.com)

C X Zone Shiver Shad

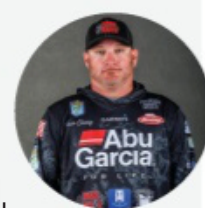
This realistic 3 3/4-inch hand-poured minnow mimic is impregnated with just the right amount of salt to be a tempting snack for a cold-front lunker. Drag it on a drop-shot rig or tight line it on a ball-head jig. 10/\$4.99 (xzonelures.com)

F Mitchell 308 PRO

Mitchell invented the spinning reel, and its latest models are awesomely high-tech. The 308 PRO — a good choice for drop-shot presentations and finesse jigs — features a lightweight Polymeric body, 10+1 bearing system and hybrid carbon fiber drag. \$74.99 (mitchellfishing.com)

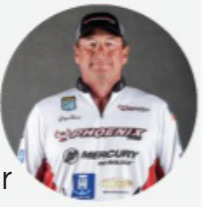
4 [Quick Tips]

Elite Series pro Hank Cherry



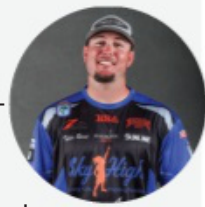
Here's my universal spinning setup for drop shots, Ned rigs, small swimbaits and other clear-water applications: a 7-3 medium action rod, 6.2:1 reel, 8-pound braid main line and an 8- or 6-pound fluorocarbon leader (6 feet long) joined to braid with a Crazy Alberto knot.

Elite Series pro Gary Clouse



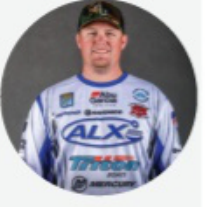
A deadly finesse presentation for prespawn lunkers in highland lakes is a trick worm or baby creature on a 3/16-ounce shaky head. I fish it around rock transitions, bluff ends and steep banks on a 7-foot medium-heavy spinning outfit with 15-pound braid and an 8-pound fluorocarbon leader.

Elite Series pro Tyler Rivet



With a small-lure presentation like a Ned rig, I recommend a 7-foot medium-heavy spinning rod with 10-pound braid and a 10-pound fluorocarbon leader. Keep the reel drag tight when setting the hook, then loosen it slightly once the fish takes off.

Elite Series pro Jake Whitaker



When probing isolated brushpiles in murky lakes, try a 6-inch finesse worm on a shaky head, using a 7-foot medium action spinning rod with 15-pound braid and an 8-foot fluorocarbon leader. Slow-drag it with short hops, then alternately shake and deadstick it once it contacts the brush.

Bedding In The Bushes

It's happening! The spring spawning season is finally here and three Hawkeye Elite Series pros share their favorite tactics for boating brutes

Water type: Southern lake
Outside: Large flats with brush and trees
Water temp: 60 to 62 degrees
Clarity: 1 foot or less
Depth: 1 to 3 feet
Structure: Flooded trees, stumps
Cover: Buckbrush, hay grass
Forage: Shad, bream
Weather: Cloudy and warm
Wind: 10 to 15 mph
Experts: A trio of Elite Series pros offer their insights for tempting spawners.

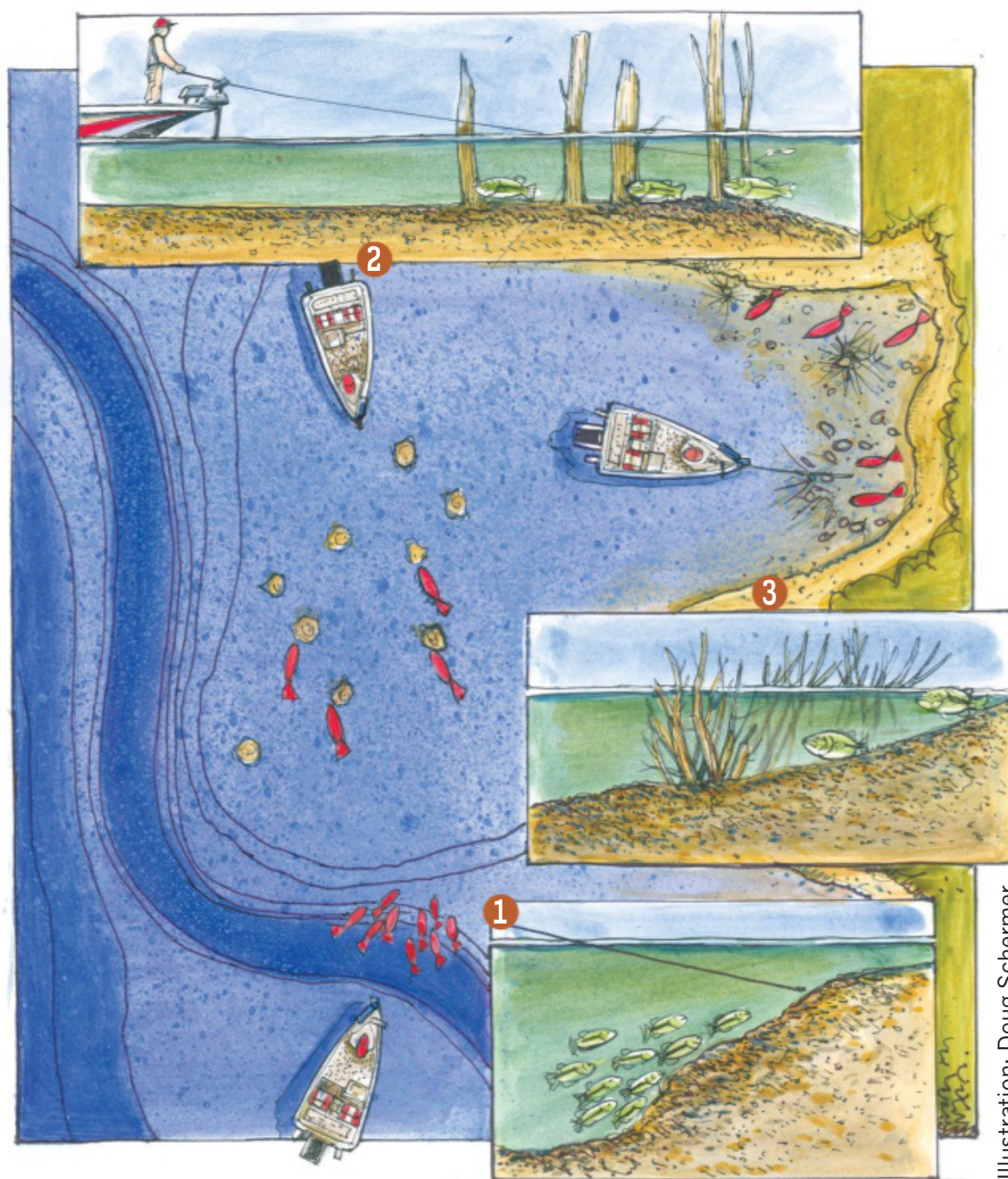


Illustration: Doug Schermer

1 PERIMETER PATROL

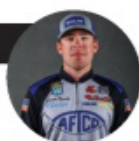
Garrett Paquette Canton, Mich.

First move: Paquette starts on the perimeter and squeezes inward. "I want to find some deeper water in the vicinity of the spawning flat. If I start catching the big ones deep, that tells me the fish are about to spawn. If I don't, I'll move onto the flat for the fish that are currently spawning. I check deeper first to make sure I don't miss the mega load of them sitting out there."

Baits/tackle to use: His first bait is a squarebill (treble hooks snare the indecisive nippers). The second bait is a Texas-rigged Big Bite Baits Fighting Frog.

Angle/boat position: Paquette knows that low trolling motor power plus long presentations equal success. "I don't want to flip 5 feet to a stump if I can see it from 20 to 25 feet away."

What to key on: Once he dials in an area with fish, Paquette slows down and meticulously dissects the immediate water. "You should be thinking there's a fish on every piece of cover you can see."



2 WIDE OPEN SPACES

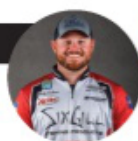
Randy Sullivan Breckenridge, Texas

First move: Identifying open areas signifying the clean, hard bottom that will attract spawners is Sullivan's first priority. "I can't have solid brush; I need open water. Sometimes, that will be under taller trees, which aren't going to have a bunch of brush under them." (He often finds such spots via Google Earth.)

Baits/tackle to use: For burning through likely areas, Sullivan selects a 1/2-ounce chartreuse/white spinnerbait with one big (size 6) willowleaf blade. For flipping stumps, he uses an Xcite Baits Raptor Tail Craw Texas rigged with a 1/2-ounce weight.

Angle/boat position: Sullivan terms Power-Poles essential to his bed fish hunt. "The fish might just nip at the [craw's] pincers, but I can Power-Pole down and make repeated flips."

What to key on: "That time of year, they're biting the bait because of where it's at. Imagine where a bed may be and pitch or drag your bait through there."



3 POCKET PRODUCTIVITY

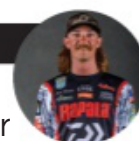
Seth Feider New Market, Minn.

First move: "I'm going to look for protected pockets where I think they'll spawn," Feider said. "Even though the water's dirty and you can't really sight fish, you can still see fish moving around in the shallow water."

Baits/tackle to use: For aggressive early arrivers, Feider uses a 1/2-ounce white buzzbait. For blind flipping to likely spots, he goes with a Texas-rigged 4-inch tube with a 1/4-ounce weight and 4/0 VMC ringed extra-wide gap hook.

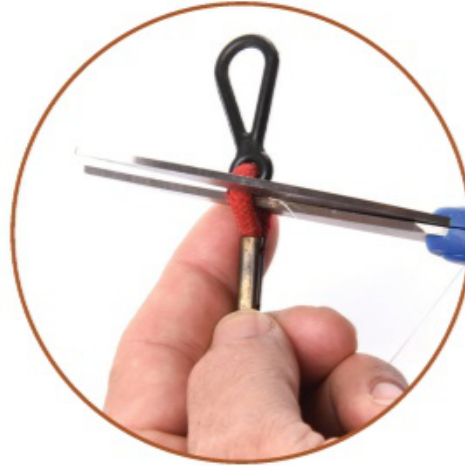
Angle/boat position: While paralleling the brush with his buzzbait, Feider explores all angles for flipping. "Pay attention to the sun; there will be holes in the trees that produce sunny spots on the bank. There's usually a fish or two spawning there."

What to key on: Slow down when you see movement. "You may flip in there and they may not bite the bait but they roll up on their side. That's when it's time to hit the brakes and keep throwing in there."



Kill Switch Upgrade

If your boat still has a straight cord lanyard that is easily tangled, it is time to make a change. The old, small clip that attaches to your PFD can be replaced with an easy on/off carabiner and the coiled cord from an old telephone handset makes for a tangle-free option that retracts out of the way when not in use. Here are a few simple steps to make one with items you likely have around the house.



1 Using a pair of scissors, cut the cord holding your kill switch key.



2 Measure the distance you need from your ignition kill switch to the driver's seat, and cut the appropriate length of telephone cord.

3 Slide your kill switch key on one end of the cord, then double over, leaving 2 inches of tag end. Using electrical tape, tightly wrap the doubled cord. Use a generous amount of tape and keep ample pressure on the tape while wrapping.



5 Add the carabiner and attach kill switch to boat ignition system.



4 On the opposite end, double the cord over, leaving a loop for the carabiner, and tightly wrap the tag end with tape. Test both ends for strength. We recommend replacing the tape each season.

[Required Tools]



Carabiner



Old telephone cord



Pliers or snips



Electrical tape

[Lunker Club]



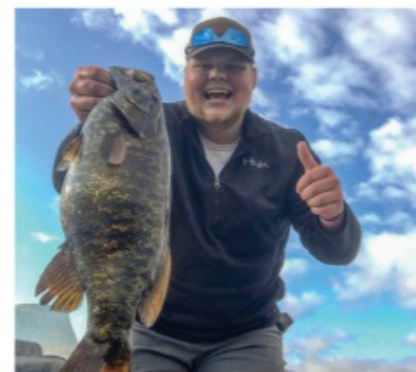
Congratulations to the newest members of the Bassmaster Lunker Club™. Membership in the club is free and open to any B.A.S.S. member who catches a largemouth bass weighing 10 pounds or more, a spotted bass weighing 5 pounds or more, or a smallmouth bass weighing 6 pounds or more, from Jan. 1, 2019, to the present. New Lunker Club members will receive an official certificate with holder and a gift pack.



11-8 Jason Broach 1
Fellsmere Reservoir, Florida
4.3-inch Keitech FAT Swing Impact swimbait (Tennessee shad)



10-8 Jewel Johnston 2
Elephant Butte Lake, New Mexico
Ned-rigged Z-Man TRD CrawZ



6-6 Dylan Iverson 3
Lake Whatcom, Washington
Strike King Dream Shot



10-2 Ron Groeneveld 4
Kings River, California
1/2-ounce Rat-L-Trap (blue shiner)



10-10 Zach Winn 5
Big Swan Lake, Georgia
3.5-inch worm



7-2 Freddy Roman 6
Lake Ontario, New York
3.8-inch Keitech FAT Swing Impact (alewife)



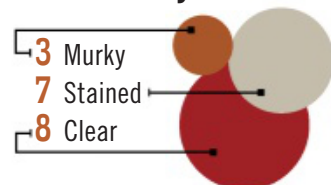
6-8 Wayne Henry 7
Turtle River, Ontario
3/8-ounce Chompers Twin-Tail Grub (green pumpkin)



11-7 DJ Dicks 8
Lake Kaweah, California
Lucky Craft LV Max-500 (shad)

[Trophy Trends]

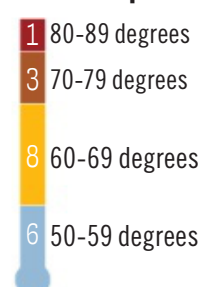
Water Clarity



Weather Conditions



Water Temperature



Type of water

15 Lake
3 River

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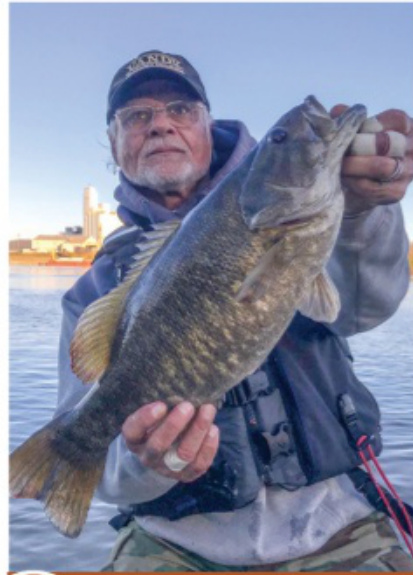
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6-15 Bill Schultz ⁹
Lake Michigan, Wisconsin
3.3-inch Keitech FAT Swing



10-2 Keith Deal ¹⁰
Jordan Lake, North Carolina
War Eagle spinnerbait



6-8 Robert Smith ¹¹
Nickajack Lake, Tennessee
3/8-ounce Jim Rivers hair jig



10-3 Allan Stack ¹²
Lake Marion, South Carolina
1/16-ounce Gamakatsu Wacky rig



6-8 Chris Hellmer ¹³
Lake Simcoe, Ontario
1-ounce, 5.5-inch Strike King (shad)



6-2 John (Lucky) Earp ¹⁴
Lake Tapps, Washington
4-inch plastic craw (green)



10-3 Tiernan Houle ¹⁵
Lake Fork, Texas
1/8-ounce jig (black/green)



10-4 Dennis Laughead ¹⁶
Leitner Lake, Georgia
1/2-ounce Strike King Red Eye Shad (red)



10-6 Randy McCullough ¹⁷
Toledo Bend, Louisiana
6-inch Zoom Trick Worm (green pumpkin)



14-9 Kobus Retief ¹⁸
Albert Falls, South Africa
1/4-ounce Texas-rigged Big Bite Baits Minnow

Date Caught

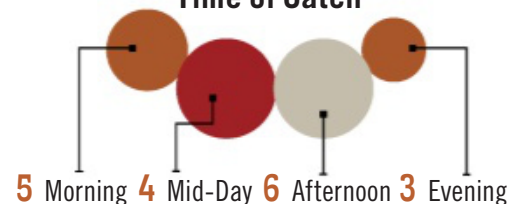
January ⁵
February ¹
March ¹¹
April ^{2 15}
May ⁷
August ^{14 18}
September ^{3 4 9 12}
October ^{6 10 13}
November ^{8 16 17}

Species

¹¹ Largemouth
⁷ Smallmouth



Time of Catch



To request an application, write to editorial@bassmaster.com or B.A.S.S., The Lunker Club, 3500 Blue Lake Drive, Suite 330, Birmingham, AL 35243. A photo documenting the catch must be provided, along with the length and girth of the bass. Only suitable photos will be published in Bassmaster Magazine. We will only accept entries for bass that are released alive. View lunker photos and get your application online at Bassmaster.com/lunker-club.



Simple Multi-Cord

A U-bolt and a dog leash create a cord that can help you stand and sit, pull your yak through shallow water and use as a stirrup to right your capsized kayak and climb back in. The whole project cost about \$20 and took less than an hour.

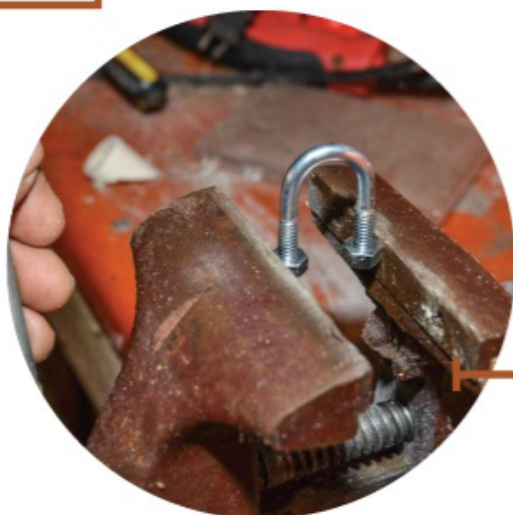


1 The leash was pricey at \$16, but I liked the handle that keeps the loop open. The only other things needed are an inexpensive U-bolt with nuts and backer and some thread lock to protect the zinc U-bolt threads from corrosion and keep the nuts tight.



2 Mark and drill two holes on a vertical wall of your kayak. The transducer scupper was the best place on my Old Town Predator PDL, offering easy access to screw on the nuts through the front hatch.

3 My holes were a tad bit too close together, so I squeezed the U-bolt in a bench vise, leaving the nuts on to protect the threads.



5 When selecting a leash, make sure the clip is small enough to fit in the installed U-bolt. At 4 feet, this leash was too long to use the handle for standing and sitting, but the extra length allowed easy towing and will work as a safety stirrup for righting the kayak and climbing back in.



4 Apply thread lock.

[Tackle Tips]



KastKing
Cooler/Dry Bag Combo
\$39.99
kastking.com



Malone
Micro Sport
\$3,019
maloneautoracks.com



FootStake
Shore Tees
\$99.99
footstake.com



YakAttack
PanFish Portrait Pro
\$60
yakattack.us



Yolotek
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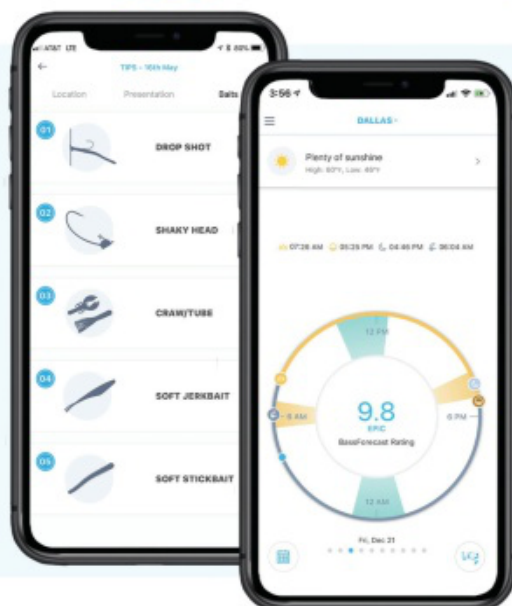
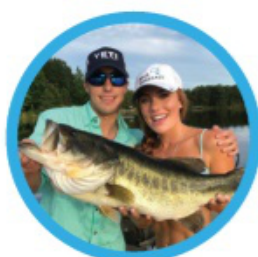
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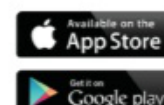
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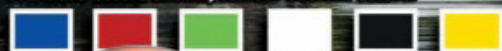
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[Parting Shot]

The Loss Of A Legend

The bass fishing world lost Forrest L. Wood, founder of Ranger boats, on Jan. 25. Wood was 87 years old. Although the man is gone, his impression on bass fishing will never fade. The Flippin, Ark., native walked alongside B.A.S.S. founder Ray Scott for the past 50 years to not only elevate the sport of bass fishing, but to improve the experience of anglers and the safety of our sport.

“The passing of Forrest Wood truly marks the end of an era. He was not only the founding father of the modern bass boat, but a dear friend,” Scott said after learning of the loss. “For those of you who did not know him personally, Forrest worked tirelessly not only to improve his own products, but to support our exploding industry in every way he could. He embraced every aspect of B.A.S.S. I remember so many cool early mornings at Bassmaster Classics as Forrest and I watched the tournament boats idle and launch as the sun barely rose. There was tall, lanky Forrest in his white cowboy hat, and a mug of hot coffee always at hand.”

Wood is an inductee in the International Game Fish Association Hall of Fame, the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame, International Boating Hall of Fame, National Marine Manufacturers Hall of Fame, and the Arkansas Game and Fish Foundation Outdoor Hall of Fame. He and his wife Nina are also inductees in the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame. Wood also received the American Sportfishing Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

Most importantly, though, Wood was a friend to bass anglers and will be missed by all.

[The Shot]

These photos were pulled from the *Bassmaster* archives. Through these historic images, you can not only see how Ranger boats evolved, but also Forrest's passion for fishing and his support for the industry he loved.



The Forrest Wood Persona



AS MOST OF you know, Forrest Wood, the founder of Ranger Boats and one of the first true legends of our sport, died in late January at the age of 87.

A lot of the folks I work with knew him well, and I hate that I didn't. Apparently, he was one of the easiest guys in the world to know. He was a true Southern gentleman with that familiar cowboy hat, a welcoming drawl and a smile as big as his home state of Arkansas.

The silhouette of him in that hat has become as synonymous with Ranger as the shield has with B.A.S.S. But through all of his accomplishments, he always had time for people, big or small.

That being said, I feel silly that I was always intimidated by him.

I've spent nearly 30 years in this business and met most of the biggest names. I've become friends with many of them, gone fishing with them and gotten comfortable enough to joke and jab with them now and then.

But some folks just have a presence about them — an unmistakable persona — that makes you feel like you should say "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" and always call them "Mr."

Ray Scott has it. Rick Clunn has it. And Forrest Wood had it, for sure.

That's why I always felt more like an adoring fan than a member of the same industry anytime he was around.

It's why my favorite story about him comes secondhand from another industry giant, Bill Dance.

As Dance tells it, the night before a Bassmaster event on Lake Toho in 1978, he decided to pull a prank on Wood, who was also fishing the event.

After seeing Wood in the hotel lobby with his wife, Nina, Dance waited for the couple to get checked in to their room and tucked in to bed. Then he had the desk clerk ring their room.

Dance remembers the conversation like this:

Wood: Hello (in that welcoming drawl).

Dance (in disguise): Mr. Wood, this is David Carson. I'm the manager here at the Holiday Inn. We want to thank

you for choosing to stay with us, but we have a major problem. Our state senator is coming in, and he always stays in the room that you're in right now. Would you mind moving down the hall before the senator gets here? He's about 30 minutes out.

Wood: Well, no sir. We're already in bed, Mr. Carson.

Dance: We apologize, Mr. Wood. But you're gonna have to get up. And if you can, would you make the bed back up and pull the wrinkles out of it so we don't have to send the maid service up?

Wood: I'm sorry, Mr. Carson, but we're not moving.

Dance: Now, Mr. Wood, I'm not an aggressive kind of guy. But when our senator is coming and he requests room 206, you will be moving.

Wood: Well, we'll just see about that, sonny boy.

Dance said it was the first time he'd ever seen or heard Wood angry.

Bill laughs himself silly every time he tells that story — just like he laughs at me every time I talk about being intimidated by Wood.

But you want to hear the kicker to that story?

Bill says he thought about knocking on Wood's door 30 minutes later. But he couldn't muster the guts.

Sadly, I know the feeling.

Rest in peace, Mr. Wood.

“ He was a true Southern gentleman with that familiar cowboy hat, a welcoming drawl and a smile as big as his home state of Arkansas. ”



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