



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Fishing Buddies and Families Win Top Prizes at Bass Pro Shops US Open Regional Qualifying Event on Lake Okeechobee

Ultimate customer appreciation event benefits conservation

Team from West Palm Beach area collects \$50,000 first-place check with Top 40 teams advancing to National Championship on Missouri's Table Rock Lake this fall



OKEECHOBEE, Fla. – Two amateur fishing buddies, Kail Stevens and Bradley MacQueen, won the first regional qualifying event for the [Bass Pro Shops US Open National Bass Fishing Amateur Team Championships](#) – a first-of-its-kind amateur fishing tournament offering the biggest payout in freshwater fishing history – on Saturday at legendary Lake Okeechobee.

Stevens and MacQueen, from Okeechobee and West Palm Beach, Fla., respectively, fished from a Triton boat and hauled in a five-fish catch weighing in at 29 pounds, with a big bass of 7.70 pounds, to top the 250-team field in the regional qualifying event. They collect a first-place prize of \$50,000 and are one of 40 teams to qualify for the National Championship on Nov. 19-21 at Big Cedar Lodge on Missouri's famed Table Rock Lake. The National Championship will be broadcast internationally on NBC and carries a \$1 million cash prize to the winning team.



Left to right: Team members Kail Stevens of Okeechobee and Bradley MacQueen of West Palm Beach finished first.



Rick Rojas and Junior Angler Cody Rojas with noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris.



250 two-person teams consisting of fishing buddies, families, and active military and veterans participated in the event at Lake Okeechobee.



“With so many friends and families making memories, we couldn’t have had a better start to our US Open Amateur Team Championships,” said noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris. “Congratulations to all the winners, and thanks to everyone who participated and reminded us why we love fishing, conservation and the great outdoors. We look forward to hosting the top 40 teams for the National Championship in Missouri this fall.”



Junior angler Hannah Mae Allen with Johnny following the weigh-in ceremony.

“We were both saying it’s pretty neat to be fishing in the first Bass Pro Shops US Open qualifying event, but to end up the

winners, we would have never thought,” said Stevens and MacQueen in an interview after the awards ceremony. “We aren’t ever going to forget this day, that’s for sure.”

Proceeds from the Bass Pro Shops US Open benefit local fisheries conservation and the future of fishing thanks to Bass Pro Shops and Toyota. The event is a true celebration of bass fishing, exclusively for amateur anglers with a guaranteed purse value of \$4.3 million.



Lucas Staton (right), a 10-year-old angler from Sorrento, Fla., fished with father James Staton, won the junior angler category.

Angler Prizes

The top 40 teams received a payout and qualified for the National Championship. Additional prizes were awarded for catching the biggest bass within the following categories:

- **Overall:** The biggest bass (8.71 pounds) was caught by Yoan Alvarez from Miami, Fla., while fishing with friend Peter Jannoti from Jacksonville, Fla., winning \$8,710 (\$1,000 per pound). Alvarez will receive a replica mount of the bass, with a replica also going on display at Bass Pro Shops in Fort Myers, Fla., and was entered into a drawing for a Nitro Z20 boat.
- **Youth Angler:** Lucas Staton, a 10-year-old angler from Sorrento, Fla., fished with father James Staton and earned

a \$1,000 Bass Pro Shops gift card for the biggest bass (5.12 pounds) among anglers ages 10 and under.

- **Junior Angler:** Daniel Henshaw, a 15-year-old angler from Church Road, Va., fished with father Donald Henshaw and earned a \$1,000 Bass Pro Shops gift card for the biggest bass (5.57 pounds) among anglers ages 11-17.
- **Family Teams:** Del and Gunnar Brown, a father-son team from Swainsboro, Ga., earned a \$1,000 Bass Pro Shops gift card for the biggest bass caught by a Family Team (7.20 pounds).
- **Veteran, Active Military or Hometown Hero Teams:**
Dustin Royer, a professional fireman from Davie, Fla., fished with son James Royer and earned a \$1,000 Bass Pro Shops gift card for the biggest bass (6.63 pounds) among veteran, active military or hometown hero anglers.
Additionally, U.S. Army Veteran Paul Lynch from Okeechobee, Fla. fished with his cousin Donnie Tomlin, a corrections officer from Bridgeton, N.J., and weighed in 2 out of 5 bass more than 5 pounds each, landing them the ultimate Johnny Morris fishing prize pack valued at \$1,000.

Families and Veterans Among the Amateurs Competing for \$1 Million

The Lake Okeechobee qualifying event featured anglers ranging in age from 6 - 80 years old. The amateur field of 250 two-person teams consisted of a cross-section of families and active military/veterans adding to the fun of the tournament, including:

- 79 military veterans

- 14 active military
- 45 father-son teams
- 16 mother-son teams
- 14 husband-wife teams
- 12 brother-brother teams
- 4 father-daughter teams
- 26 female anglers

Benefiting the Future of Fishing in Florida & Beyond

The eight regional qualifying events, including Lake Okeechobee, benefit local fish habitat, with proceeds supporting [The National Fish Habitat Partnership](#). One-third of all entry fees will directly support the partnership, with Bass Pro Shops and longstanding conservation partner Toyota matching each donation, enabling an amount equal to 100 percent of all entry fees – more than \$1 million – to benefit conservation.

Lake Okeechobee, one of the nation's best bass fishing lakes and headwaters to the Everglades, is like no other. Spanning more than 700 square miles, the sheer size presents a challenge to understanding the lake's scale and conservation concerns. Bass Pro Shops is working alongside state wildlife agencies and local partners to tackle priority conservation projects in restoring water quality and fish habitat of this vital natural resource.

Across Florida, Bass Pro Shops is proud to partner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in

enhancing, conserving and promoting trophy bass fishing through the nationally-renowned [TrophyCatch](#) program. The incentive-based conservation program designed for anglers who catch-and-release largemouth bass heavier than 8 pounds allows for invaluable research and trophy bass management in Florida. Lake Okeechobee remains one of the top five producing waters for TrophyCatch, and increasing participation in the program is important for future management success on the lake.

In keeping with its longstanding commitment to conservation, Johnny Morris and Bass Pro Shops partnered with the Florida FWC to help ensure all fish caught during the Bass Pro Shops US Open regional qualifying event on Lake Okeechobee were released responsibly following a fish-friendly weigh-in.

Remaining Regional Qualifying Events

April 17 – Lake Ray Roberts, Texas (*registration closed*)

April 24 – Lake Mead, Nevada (*registration closed*)

July 17 – Chesapeake Bay, Maryland (*registration opens May 12*)

Aug. 21 – Lake St. Clair, Michigan (*registration opens May 12*)

Sept. 11 – Old Hickory Lake, Tennessee (*registration opens July 14*)

Oct. 16 – Grand Lake, Oklahoma (*registration opens July 14*)

Nov. 17 – Bull Shoals Lake, Arkansas (*registration date TBA*)

To learn more about the Bass Pro Shops US Open and how to register for remaining regional qualifying events, visit www.basspro.com/usopen.

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About Bass Pro Shops

[Bass Pro Shops](#) is North America's premier outdoor and conservation company. Founded in 1972 when avid young angler Johnny Morris began selling tackle out of his father's liquor store in Springfield, Missouri, today the company provides customers with unmatched offerings spanning premier destination retail, outdoor equipment manufacturing, world-class resort destinations and more. In 2017 Bass Pro Shops acquired [Cabela's](#) to create a "best-of-the-best" experience with superior products, dynamic locations and outstanding customer service. Bass Pro Shops also operates [White River Marine Group](#), offering an unsurpassed collection of industry-leading boat brands, and [Big Cedar Lodge](#), America's Premier Wilderness Resort. Under the visionary conservation leadership of Johnny Morris, Bass Pro Shops is a national leader in protecting habitat and introducing families to the outdoors and has been named by Forbes as "one of America's Best Employers."

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