



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **North Carolina Team Collects \$50,000 First-Place Check at Bass Pro Shops US Open Regional Qualifying Event in Nashville**

*Top 40 teams advancing to National Championship on Missouri's Table Rock Lake this fall*

*Event honored 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11, 2001 with patriotic tributes*



*First place winners and long-time fishing buddies Brandon Gray (left) of Bullock, N.C. and Allen Kingree (right) of Henderson, N.C., at weigh-in on Saturday, September 11.*

**HENDERSONVILLE, Tenn.** – Amateur fishing buddies Brandon Gray and Allen Kingree claimed first place at the 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, September 11, on Old Hickory Lake near Nashville.

Gray from Bullock, N.C., and Kingree from Henderson, N.C., fished from a Triton boat and hauled in a five-fish catch weighing in at 16.21 pounds to top the 250-team field. 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.



*New fishing buddies Terri Davis (left) and Amanda Huff (right) from Chilhowie, Va., won the All-Female Team category with 1.98-pound bass.*



*Mickey Beck (left) from Lebanon, Tenn., who served in the Army 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Signal Battalion, and his fishing partner John Dickerson from Columbia, Tenn., won the Veteran Angler category with a 5.21-pound bass.*

“Thank you to everyone at Bass Pro Shops for putting this together,” said first-place winner Brandon Gray after winning the first-place \$50,000 prize. “This event is all about conservation, and I think with the amount of participation we have seen here today, we were able to do some unbelievable work for conservation.”

## 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:

- **Biggest Bass:** The biggest bass (5.76 pounds) was caught by fishing buddies Stacy Benningfield and Charlie Mattingly from Lebanon, Ky. Benningfield and Mattingly earned \$5,760 for the catch (\$1,000 per pound), will receive a replica mount of the bass with a duplicate going on display at Bass Pro Shops in Nashville, Tenn., and was entered into a drawing for a Nitro Z20 boat.



*Charlie Mattingly from Lebanon, Ky., landed a 5.76-pound Old Hickory whopper to win the Biggest Bass category and take home \$5,760.*



*Brothers Eli Thomason (right), a 16-year-old angler from Dalton, Ga., won the Junior Angler category with a 3.56-pound bass. Eli fished with his brother Avry Thomas.*

- **Junior Angler:** Eli Thomason, a 16-year-old angler from Dalton, Ga., fished with brother Avry Thomason and earned a \$1,000 Bass Pro Shops gift card for catching the biggest bass (3.56 pounds) among anglers ages 11-17.
- **Veteran:** Long-time fishing buddies Mickey Beck from Lebanon, Tenn., and John Dickerson from Columbia, Tenn., earned a \$1,000 Bass Pro Shops gift card for catching the biggest bass (5.21 pounds) by a Veteran team.

### **Patriotic tributes in remembrance of 9/11**

As the US Open qualifying event took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11, 2021, the weekend was filled with patriotic tributes to honor the men and women whose lives were changed by the tragic events of that day.

On the evening prior to the tournament, Bass Pro Shops founder and noted conservationist Johnny Morris held a special remembrance ceremony for the anglers and invited veterans. In partnership with Helping a Hero, Morris surprised the families of two wounded veterans with new specially adapted homes through the organization's Wounded Hero Home Program. Helping A Hero's National Ambassador and "God Bless the USA" singer Lee Greenwood also made a surprise performance with special guest Tony Orlando for attendees and their families.

During the tournament, the Remembering Our Fallen photographic war memorial was on display, as part of a nationwide tour organized by not-for-profit Patriotic



Productions. The memorial honors our military members who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty post-Sept. 11, preserving the images and stories of these American heroes on 34 individual Tribute Towers.

### **Benefiting the Future of Fishing**

The Old Hickory Lake qualifying event benefits conservation with proceeds supporting [The National Fish Habitat Partnership](#). Thanks to Bass Pro Shops and Toyota, 100 percent of all entry fees – over \$1 million throughout the tournament – will fund critical fisheries conservation and habitat projects nationwide.



*Anglers and fans enjoyed free outdoor events and activities designed to help families get excited about the outdoors.*

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

### **Remaining Regional Qualifying Events**

Oct. 2 – Lake Havasu, Arizona (*registration closed*)

Oct. 16 – Grand Lake, Oklahoma (*registration closed*)

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

To learn more about the Bass Pro Shops US Open and how to register for the final qualifying event at Bull Shoals Lake, visit [www.basspro.com/usopen](http://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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