

Sign of the Times: No more co-anglers in Bassmaster Opens

By Frank Sargeant, Editor
The Water Wire

Forward facing sonar (FFS) may have claimed another victim as Bassmaster quietly announced in late December they will no longer have co-anglers or back-of-boat fishermen in their popular Bassmaster Opens. B.A.S.S. said that participation in the program slumped significantly during and after the COVID years. They did not say this, but this is also about the same time many more tournament anglers bought and began to use FFS. The all-seeing sonar illuminates

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hundreds of quality open-water fish that anglers never knew were there before, and catches have shot up exponentially in events where the habitat and timing put the majority of fish offshore.

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Co-anglers will continue to have opportunities to win big prizes, both in B.A.S.S. and MLF events, organizers say. (Photo/Courtesy: MLF)

sits and watches the boat-owner fish FFS bass. So, he doesn't sign up again. Alternatively, if a remarkably generous pro lets a back-of-boat angler throw a few shots at the available fish on screen and catch a few, the scales quickly get out of whack because not everybody has a backseater and most assuredly are not sharing FFS fish. A co-angler could become a significant liability, rather than a potential backseat asset finding fish the pro might have missed. (To be sure, some boaters are generous with co-anglers, leave the console graph running so they can see bottom structure and fish and generally consider them a partner aboard. But when the boater has big money and a ticket to higher competition levels on

the line, having that extra rod aft can be less than appealing.) Some anglers also said that the co-anglers occasionally spoke out of school, revealing a technique or a spot they had observed to other competitors. And the boaters in these events rightly point out they pay much higher entry fees and face all the expenses and worries of buying and maintaining the boat, which

obviously has to give them sway in how a day on the water goes. In any case, the Bassmaster Opens will no longer have non-boaters. But B.A.S.S. has plenty of other affordable tournament competitions where backseaters will remain a welcome part of the bassing scene, continue to have learning opportunities, and perhaps in a few cases make their

way into the ranks of the pros. "It was a tough call," says Hank Weldon, Bassmaster Opens tournament director. "But, now that we have a home for our co-anglers in the new B.A.S.S. Nation Qualifiers, it just makes sense. These avid anglers will still have the opportunity to compete at a high level and our Opens pros will be able to pursue their dreams in a league that couldn't be more fair ... or more competitive."

The "other" tournaments are affordable as bassing competitions go: Bass Nation entry fee for a national qualifier is \$400 for a boater and \$200 for a co-angler. There are four national qualifiers through the B.A.S.S. Nation. Anglers can have an opportunity to make it to the Bassmaster Elite Series and the Bassmaster Classic through qualifying for the B.A.S.S. Nation Championship. See full rules here: <https://www.bassmaster.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-BASS-Nation-Rules-Final-1.16.24.pdf>

The 2025 Bassmaster Opens will kick off at Clarks Hill Reservoir on Jan 23-25 (Full Opens Schedule), while the first B.A.S.S. Nation Qualifier will be held at Pickwick Lake March 12-14. Major League Fishing also has a continuing co-angler program, with big prizes for annual top rods. See details at www.majorleaguefishing.com.

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Huk partners with B.A.S.S. to launch the Bassmaster College Series All-American Program; Eight to be named in 2026 class

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. January 15, 2025 — Launching in 2025, B.A.S.S. has announced the Bassmaster College Series All-American Program and welcomes presenting sponsor Huk, a leader in performance fishing apparel and footwear, to this new initiative. The program will name eight College All-Americans to its 2026 class, with finalists being determined based on their performance in the 2025 Strike King Bassmaster College Series presented by Bass Pro Shops. The top two highest-finishing teams in the Strike King Bassmaster College Series Bass Pro Shops Team of the Year race as well as each team that stands atop the rankings in the Legends and Lunkers divisions of the College Series will receive the exclusive honor of being named a Bassmaster College All-American. The All-Americans will be honored on the biggest stage in bass fishing, the 2026 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Classic presented by Under Armour. "The All-American designation is awarded to the very best college fishermen in the country and is based on team performance during the season," said Glenn Cale, B.A.S.S. tournament manager for the College, High School and Junior Series. "These young anglers will battle it out in three events in one of two divisions. The road to being named an All-American is not an easy path; these anglers are extremely skilled, and they take each competition very seriously for their schools." "Huk was founded by creating performance driven energy through tournament fishing and we're stoked to bring this same level of excitement to the Bassmaster All-American program," said Prescott Hughes, Huk Fishing marketing manager. "Opportunities like this will drive the future of the sport and inspire



youth anglers to make it to the next level. The passion these collegiate anglers bring to the sport is unmatched and we are excited to bring added fuel this season." The Bassmaster College Series features a two-division format with three tour stops each — the Legends Trail and the Lunkers Trail. The Legends Trail kicks off the 2025 season Jan. 22-23 at Harris Chain of Lakes in Leesburg, Fla., before traveling to Smith Lake in Cullman, Ala., Feb. 26-27 and then making its final stop at Lake Eufaula in Eufaula, Okla., April 2-3. The Lunkers Trail will begin competition at Lake Okeechobee

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in Clewiston, Fla., Jan. 29-30, and will then head to Buggs Island in Mecklenburg County, N.C., April 30-May 1 before closing out the regular season at Chickamauga Lake in Dayton, Tenn., May 30-31. The Team of the Year race can be followed throughout the season on Bassmaster.com.

About Marolina Outdoor Inc. Marolina Outdoor Inc. was founded to bring deep-seated product expertise across all outdoor categories. Our innovative designs and technologically focused products create the foundation of our authentic outdoor apparel. Huk Performance Fishing apparel represents a fresh take and a unique understanding of angling needs, offering functional styles that appeal to anglers of all ages. Huk is motivated to provide quality apparel so anglers can maximize their fishing adventures and provide quality comfort and style regardless of the size of the fish or where their pursuit leads them. Visit Huk.com for more information. About B.A.S.S. B.A.S.S., which encompasses the Bassmaster tournament leagues, events and media platforms, is the worldwide authority on bass fishing and keeper of the culture of the sport, providing cutting-edge content on bass fishing whenever, wherever and however bass fishing fans want to use it. Headquartered in Birmingham, Ala., the organization's fully integrated media platforms include the industry's leading

magazines (Bassmaster and B.A.S.S. Times), website (Bassmaster.com), TV show, radio show, social media programs and events. For more than 50 years, B.A.S.S. has been dedicated to access, conservation and youth fishing. The Bassmaster Tournament Trail includes the most prestigious events at each level of competition, including the Bassmaster Elite Series, St. Croix Bassmaster Opens Series presented by SEVIN, Mercury B.A.S.S. Nation Qualifier Series presented by Lowrance, Strike King Bassmaster College Series presented by Bass Pro Shops, Strike King Bassmaster High School Series, Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Team Championship, Newport Bassmaster Kayak Series presented by Native Watercraft, Yamaha Bassmaster Redfish Cup Championship presented by Skeeter and the ultimate celebration of competitive fishing, the Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Classic presented by Under Armour. Connect with #Bassmaster on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.

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