

Justin Hamner makes dream reality with win in Oklahoma's Grand Lake O' the Cherokees with \$300,000 prize victory

By Frank Sargeant
Water World Wire

Where I live in rural Alabama, it's not uncommon to see a \$100,000 bass boat parked in front of a \$30,000 mobile home. For many young anglers—and some not so young—the lure of fishing for money and the chance to change their fortunes on any given cast is irresistible.

Justin Hamner made the dream a reality Sunday with his win at Oklahoma's Grand Lake O' the Cherokees. He took home not only the Ray Scott Trophy, but some \$300,000 in prize money, presumably enough to quickly move him out of his mobile home in Northport. (Northport is the north side of Tuscaloosa,

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home of Nick Saban until recently, but Nick has now gone fishin' in Florida.)

Northport is near the confluence of three lakes, Lake Tuscaloosa, Lake Nicole and Holt Lake, and Alabama is tournament bass central, long time home of B.A.S.S. after a brief sojourn to Orlando. It's where bass angler dreams are born, and sometimes realized.

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Justin Hamner got a life-changing win at Grand Lake O' the Cherokees last week as he became Bassmaster Classic champion. (B.A.S.S.)



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Hamner's win continues the trend of younger anglers winning the major events as some of the superstars of years past age out of competition, and others drop out because of changes in the game. Certainly, the meteoric rise of video game fishing with scanning sonar has been a factor in lots of screen-smart younger anglers winning major events over the last five years.

Even though the Classic this year was held in a prime pre-spawn period when there were some quality fish on or near the shore-lines, Hamner made significant use of his forward scan sonar for his winning catch.

For those of us in the lower income brackets, the win is both encouraging and discouraging. On the one hand, we can see that with hard work and smarts and a dollop of luck you too can win in effect win the lottery.

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On the other hand, we can also see that the price of entry—particularly the extremely technical electronics—is growing exponentially. How does a working man—the guys (nearly all of them are males) who fix the trucks and hammer the nails and put on the shingles and do all of the other things that keeps our society working—come up with the payments on a \$100,000 bass rig? To say nothing of also perhaps supporting a young family at the same time? And how does he convince his wife that tournament entry fees and travel costs and a truck to pull his rig are an investment instead of his hobby? Trailer life ain't bad—many of us not to the manor born have enjoyed it at some time in our lives. Outdoor writers used to be particularly prone. But for most, it's not where you hope to wind up as Social Security age approaches. Justin Hamner's win gives hope to all of us, and that is perhaps the secret of why so many of us continue to play bass tournament lotto hoping that one of these days, our numbers will come up.

Tennesseans invited to donate in state parks competition in My TN State Park Fundraiser; Vote for your favorite Tennessee Park now

NASHVILLE – Tennessee State Parks, in partnership with the Tennessee State Parks Conservancy, will hold the annual My

TN State Park fundraiser in April, when supporters “vote” for their favorite parks through contributions.

The fundraiser runs April 1-30, 2024. Each park retains the funds donated for it, and the contributions will go toward projects

identified by park staff. Examples of such projects include trail repair, birds of prey programs, and children's education efforts.

Each dollar donated to a state park will count as one vote for that park. Anyone interested may donate at tnstateparks.com/vote. Winners will be announced May 6, 2024.

“We know Tennesseans are passionate about their state parks, and we invite them to show their support by contributing,” said Greer Tidwell, deputy commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. “Entry to the parks remains free, but the donations will benefit the parks in ways specific to their needs, so the contributions can have a strong impact.”

The Tennessee State Parks Con-

servancy is a nonprofit fundraising partner working with donors and the state to fund parks programs.

“Donations from this fundraiser continually allow state parks to make unique enhancements and improvements each year that benefit not only park visitors, but local communities as well,” said Gina Hancock, executive director of the Tennessee State Parks Conservancy. “There is a great range of projects that the parks aim to accomplish with this year’s funds – from new trails to accessible resources, educational programs and more – and we encourage all Tennesseans to show their support by voting throughout the month.”

Parks are categorized into four groups based on location. The park that receives the most votes

within each group will be awarded and recognized. There will also be an award for "most improved" given to the park with the highest percentage increase in donations from last year's fundraiser.

Last year, over 1,600 donations poured in, totaling over \$113,000. The winning parks last year were Paris Landing State Park (\$5,629); South Cumberland State Park (\$3,363; and Frozen Head State Park (\$10,707). Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park had the highest increase in donations year over year last year, exceeding its goal and raising over \$6,000.

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