

Aaron Yavorsky wins Bassmaster Team Championship Classic Fish-Off; Becomes youngest to qualify for Classic

LEESBURG, Fla. , Dec. 9, 2023— Aaron Yavorsky could have idled inside the Venetian Gardens Marina all day Saturday and still won the 2023 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Team Championship Classic Fish-Off.

But instead of taking his foot off the gas after virtually securing the tournament title on Friday, the 17-year-old Yavorsky put the proverbial pedal to the metal. And in doing so, he scrawled his name into the B.A.S.S. history books — with authority.

Following the 30-pound, 7-ounce limit of five bass he weighed on Day 1, Yavorsky caught another limit Saturday, this one weighing 17-13. And though his final bag was the lightest he caught this week, it absolutely was more than enough to secure the Fish-Off title with a two-day weight of 48-4.

It was as commanding a win as one could imagine in a tournament of this magnitude. Second place went to Connor Nimrod of the Media Bass Trail in north Louisiana, who caught 25-14 over two days, more than 22 pounds behind Yavorsky.

The decisive victory earned Yavorsky the final berth into the 2024 Bassmaster Classic, which will be held March 22-24 on Oklahoma’s Grand Lake O’ the Cherokees. He is the youngest person to ever qualify for the Classic, a distinction previously owned by David Brind of New York, who was 18 when he worked his way through the former B.A.S.S. Federation (now the B.A.S.S. Nation) to land a spot in the 1979 Classic on Lake



Aaron Yavorsky of the Florida BASS Nation Team Trail has won the 2023 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Team Championship Classic Fish-Off with a total of 48 pounds, 4 ounces. (Photo by Dalton Tumblin/B.A.S.S.)

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Yavorsky will turn 18 on March 15, a week before his sport’s biggest event begins.

“I’ve never been to Oklahoma,” he said. “I’ve never even been to a Classic either, though I’ve watched them on live TV for a long time. I don’t know what to say about making it. I’m kind of speechless right now.”

Yavorsky let his fishing do the talking on the Harris Chain of Lakes instead. He stormed to a nearly 16-pound advantage on Day 1 of the Fish-Off with a 30-7 limit. That whopping bag certainly took some of the pressure off the young Palm Harbor, Fla.,

resident, but he knew his fellow competitors wouldn’t just hand him the title. He proved twice earlier in the tournament that 30-pound sacks are possible here in central Florida, so resting on his Day 1 success was not an option. The young Yavorsky was relentless again on Saturday, rocketing out of Venetian Gardens at 7 a.m. and making the 30-minute run to Lake Carlton, where he boated his best bass this week. He worked a shellbar there in about 10 feet of water, throwing a Strike King 5XD crankbait over an area that is about 200 to 300 yards long. He said bait color was not important as long as it

closely matched the water clarity in Carlton, not to mention the shad that hefty bass were chomping there.

Saturday wasn’t without challenges. The wind, crucial to his earlier bags, was nowhere to be found early on Day 2. Several spectator boats also were near his top spot when he arrived for what he hoped would be the finishing touches on a championship.

Instead, fate made the teenager wait for his chances. And Yavorsky didn’t blink, putting his first bass in the livewell about noon. When quick catches didn’t follow, though, he left Carlton

for Lake Dora to fish grassbeds he and his dad, Rodney, worked on Day 1 of the Team Championship portion of the event, which they eventually won. That move proved unsuccessful, so he headed back to Carlton and hunkered down for his limit.

“Nerves played a part,” Aaron said. “We weren’t even launched yet and I couldn’t tie on a lure. A bunch of things ran through my head, especially when I didn’t have a fish until noon. It was really slow ... but the wind picked back up in the afternoon and that was big. It got the bait moving.”

Then the bigger bites he enjoyed earlier in the week started again. “I was burning that 5XD as fast as I could,” he said. “I really had to hit the fish down there. It would knock off of them and they’d get aggravated when it hit them. It was more a reaction bite.”

The Yavorskys, representing the Florida BASS Nation Team Trail, qualified for the Fish-Off portion of this tournament after totaling 51-9 on Wednesday and Thursday to win \$25,000 and the Team Championship. That was almost 14 pounds more than the second-place team of Blain Bartley and Rj Graham of Pennsylvania’s Keystone Bass Buddy Circuit, who split \$17,000. The tandem of Nimrod and Thomas Soileau from Media Bass finished third overall in the team event and won \$12,000.

The Top 3 teams (six anglers in all) advanced to the Fish-Off on Friday and Saturday. Their team weights were zeroed, and each

competed individually for a shot at the Classic

From the jump, the Fish-Off belonged to a 17-year-old fishing with skills that defy his age and experience.

“I don’t think it’s sunk in yet, that I’m going to the Bassmaster Classic,” he said.

The Yavorskys left Venetian Gardens not long after Aaron hoisted the Fish-Off championship trophy. They were headed to Lake Okeechobee where Aaron was due to compete in a Florida B.A.S.S. Nation High School event this weekend. There may be some pre-fishing at Grand Lake in his future, too, but the next stop before the Classic is more typical of a young man of 17.

"Economics class is my first thing Monday morning," he said. "At 7 a.m."

Rounding out the field of six in the Fish-Off — behind Yavorsky and Nimrod — are third, Graham, 14-15; fourth, Soileau, 10-14; fifth, Bartley, 6-10; and sixth, Rodney Yavorsky, 6-0.

The Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Team Championship, held Wednesday and Thursday, featured 248 duos representing 77 different bass trails. In all, anglers came to the Harris Chain from 30 different states and three foreign countries to compete for part of the \$125,000 cash purse that was split among the Top 50 teams.

The Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Team Championship was hosted by Visit Lake, the City of Leesburg and the Greater Orlando Sports Commission.

Jim Shepherd examines the Peacemaker concealed carry jacket from sports-military 2

explained the Peacemaker jacket offered “protection for your vitals when you’re crouched down with your handgun.”

The jacket features a breakaway construction (they call it their HIDDEN DRAW system) allowing you to easily put your hands into the (shallow) pockets or slip you hand around your firearm under the jacket.

At that point, you can either draw and fire through the jacket, or use the breakaway to present the weapon. That could be an advantage when you’re looking at the normal “rip and draw” training required to carry under most “cover garments”.

Their website also asked -and answered a basic question: “why a bulletproof jacket and not a bulletproof vest?”

Two reasons: convenience and concealability.

A jacket with bulletproof inserts is far simpler to wear- inconspicuously- than a bullet proof vest or body armor. And the whole idea of concealed carry is...concealment.

The Peacemaker jacket with plates isn’t a cheap solution. Their \$349 price tag is considerably more expensive than other lightweight, waterproof, wind-proof, triple-layer nylon jackets. The higher cost is -obviously- the bulletproof characteristics. Which begs the question: are they really bulletproof?

The shortest answer is “yes.”



The Peacemaker jacket (top) doesn’t look exactly like every other nylon jacket. If you notice bulges on hips that indicate guns or lines in pockets that mean knives, you’ll notice some “printing”. What observers won’t know is that those lines are bulletproof panels (see at right). (Photos/Courtesy: OWDN)

Knowing the jacket wouldn’t stop a bullet, I shot one of the panels. It stopped my three chosen rounds:.22 LR, 9mm and .45ACP. None of them penetrated the panel, but each of

them left a decided impression. That means none of them should penetrate the wearer. But keeping bullets from punching holes in you won’t make you John Wick. You’re not going to be jumping

right back up and resuming the fight if you take a hit in a soft armor panel.

There will be trauma. You’ll be bruised and battered, but you should live. That’s the

point -to keep you alive where you might not survive otherwise. The purpose of the Peacemaker is the same as first aid. It’s not the only aid you may require; it’s the aid to allow you to survive long



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enough to get real medical aid. The edge that may mean life and not the alternative.

It’s the reason police officers, soldiers and other first responders carry IFAKs (Individual First Aid Kits) and tourniquets, wear body armor and carry guns - to help ensure their survival.

They’re not looking for trouble, but their jobs are to deal with troublemakers. They’re equipped accordingly.

We should be equipped for avoidance, not conflict.

But not all conflict can be anticipated nor avoided. That’s their reasoning behind concealed carry - and protection like the Peacemaker jacket. Fighting isn’t the reason; surviving is.

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