

LAKE OF THE OZARKS

FREE

Fishing News

Winter 2017

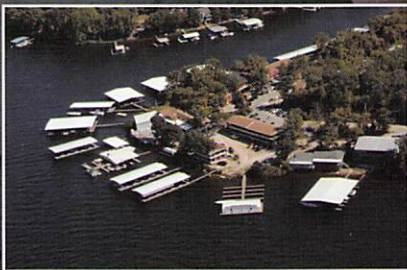
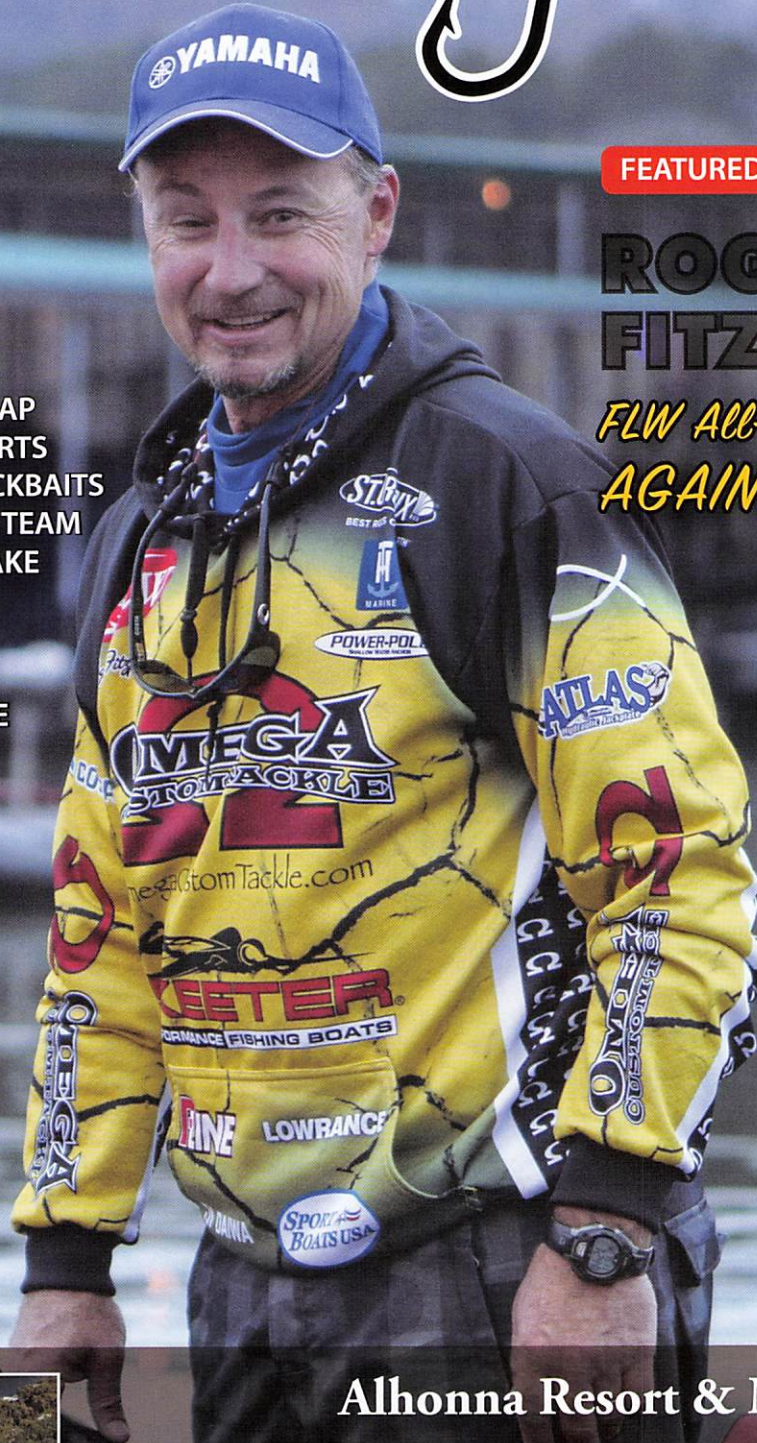
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- WINTER CRAPPIE EXPERTS
- WHATS NEW WITH STICKBAITS
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- 7 BENEFITS OF A GUIDE IN WINTER

FEATURED ANGLER

ROGER FITZPATRICK

FLW All-American Bound, AGAIN!



Alhonna Resort & Marina

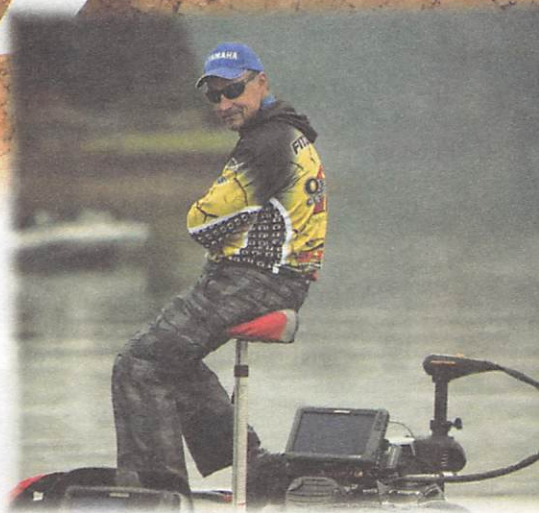
In This Issue: We spotlight Alhonna Resort & Marina Family Serving Families and Fisherman for 38 Years!

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with **Roger Fitzpatrick**

Roger Fitzpatrick is one of the most respected anglers in the mid-west. The Six Time All-American Qualifier boasts 46 career top ten finishes with FLW. This year Roger has managed to qualify for yet another All-American by finishing second in the BFL Regional on Kentucky Lake. Roger followed up the next week with a second place finish in the FLW Costa on the Lake of the Ozarks. Since Roger has shown so much consistency over the the past year, we decided to sit down with Roger for a little bass fishing Q&A.



Q When did you start tournament fishing?

A “Back when I was in college, my brother Wayne and I started fishing river tournaments with the Gasconade Bass Club. We would fish primarily the Osage and Gasconade River. He and I both had a 17ft aluminum jet boat, and we basically lived on the rivers. We ended up doing really well in those river tournaments and it kind of took off from there. In highschool I was very competitive in sports, but when I got to college I tore my ACL. Sports were pretty much done for me, so at that point tournament fishing just took over the competitive aspect of those sports, and once I started seeing some success, it just sort of snowballed from there.

Q When did you start fishing tournaments on Lake of the Ozarks?

A “I moved to the lake area around twenty-five years ago, and that’s

when I really started fishing the lake more. At that time, I teamed up with Mark, who was a friend from Jeff City that had a fiberglass boat. Growing up fishing the river, all we knew was fishing shallow muddy water, so whenever we fished a tournament, we wouldn’t stop until we hit the 70 mile marker, which was Buffalo Creek. That’s all we knew. Whenever we would practice, we would put in at Hiawatha Beach there in Little Buffalo and just got to learn that river like the back of our hand. At that time it was way before GPS was a thing, and if you have ever been up that river you would know that it gets a little hairy in some places. We figured out that the best time to learn that river was in March when the lake was drawn down all the way. At that time all of the hazards are visible, so I learned all of that the old fashioned way and really got comfortable with the area. I couldn’t tell you how many times we made that river run, but I can tell you that to get to our starting spot in Mark’s boat it took about 40 minutes right on the dot every single time.”

Q What was your first bass boat?

A “Whenever I was ready to graduate from my aluminum boat, a Yamaha dealer named Dan Vareen hooked me up with a promotional engine. That allowed me to use the engine for a year if I helped sell it before the next year. At that time, I also went to Eberlin Marine and bought a 195 Charger to put that promotional engine on. Essentially I was just out the cost of the boat. I did that for a couple of years, and that helped me get my feet on the ground to where I could afford to get into a good boat and move on later down the road.”

Q Over the years, what is one of your most memorable tournaments?

A “Without a doubt it would be the very first All-American that I fished on Lake Hamilton. It was memorable for a couple of different reasons. One reason was it was the only tournament

that my parents were ever able to come to. They traveled with us and got to witness what it was all about. At that time it was a really big deal, and it was possibly more lucrative than it is today in terms of media coverage. I can remember it vividly. They draw lake Hamilton down in the wintertime to 13ft below normal pool. So I went down the winter before the tournament and marked a bunch of brush piles on my hand held GPS. Before we had the fancy charts and graphs that we do today, I used that hand held GPS to mark a bunch of stuff on that lake. Out of the fifty piles that I marked, only one of them held fish in the event. I can remember the first day of the tournament. I think I had two fish pretty early, both out of that one good pile. After that I ran to several more piles that I marked and tried to hit, but with that old hand held GPS it was very difficult to hit the exact cast that I needed to make. I ended up getting very frustrated. It was at about 11 a.m. and I had two scrawny keepers. I can remember running down the lake praying to god to not get embarrassed at my first All-American in front of all these people. So I went to my next pile, and I casted and casted but I couldn't hit that lousy thing. At that moment I said to myself, "Ok Roger, go do what you know you can do." So I reached down into my rod locker, pulled out a little brown jig, went to the back of a creek and started on the last dock. I saw a little ball of fry on the corner of that dock, so I swam my jig past it and caught a Keeper. Went to the other side of the dock, saw a little ball of fry and caught another good one. So then I go to the next dock, see a ball of fry, swam my jig through it and caught a three pounder. When I swung that fish in the boat, I turned to my co-angler and said "I'm gonna win this tournament", and he said "I believe you". To make a long story short, that was the last year that they zeroed the weights on day three. I ended up losing a couple of fish that last day, and if I land any one of them I would have won it. For years I was bitter about that last day, and really had a hard time dealing with why those big fish came off my jig for no reason. But you know, I look back on it today and I realize that there is a reason for everything. I was young and really ambitious at the time, so there was probably a lot of things in my life that would have changed had I won the event looking back on it. I could have pursued that career, and who knows? I could have been the next KVD, but I also could

have ended up broke and without a family. So looking back I don't regret a thing. It was a learning experience and a very good one at that."

Q What is your favorite style of fishing?

A "I don't know that I have a favorite. There are so many things that I really like to do. I Really like throwing a one-ounce jig out deep. I learned a lot at the All-American on Pickwick Lake last year as far as catching schooling fish goes, but on this lake I have a lot of confidence in just fishing structure and ledges. Although the most success that I have had looking back has probably been on topwater. My partner Dennis and I have won two boats in the fall of the year on a buzzbait. This last year on Kentucky Lake I qualified for the All-American again on topwater, and came back a week later with a strong finish in the Costa on topwater. I have had very good luck throwing topwater and I enjoy throwing it, but if I had to pick a favorite style, it would probably be throwing that big ole heavy jig on structure."

Q You have been consistently finishing at the top this whole year, what do you think is the key to consistent success in tournament fishing?

A "As I have gotten older, probably one thing that has changed more than anything is that I have become way more patient. I used to be just a run and gun style of fisherman. If I was in a tournament and it wasn't going well right away, I would a lot of times go and run 30 miles in a different direction. I have grown to where I am way more patient and I don't look at my watch near as much. During tournament days I used to look at it all the time. My advice is to fish the spot that you are at rather than think about the next spot. Just fish where you are at and slow down. Another key that I have been blessed with is having time to practice. In the regionals I had a week to practice, and that allowed me to fish it all and really dial in a pattern."

Q How do you approach practice on a foreign lake?

A "We went to grand lake a couple of years ago where I had a week

to practice, just like the regionals. That week is so crucial because it allows me to decipher everything. For tournaments like that, I will go six or seven hours without starting my engine. I'll put the trolling motor down and just fish everything that I come to. I will do that for the first two or three days until I have narrowed something down and then try to fine tune what I have going. Another thing that I will try to do is look at history. There is so much information on the internet now, and it's a lot easier to find out ways that tournaments have been won in the past. I'll look at the time of the year, for instance, the last five regionals on Kentucky Lake have been won on topwater baits south of Paris. So this year when I went down there, I told myself that that's what I was going to do. So I put in at New Johnsonville, and happened to get lucky by putting my trolling motor down right on top of the fish. I had a limit in the first thirty minutes of practice on one spot. In years past I would not have made that long run, but I just knew from looking at the history that the area south of Paris was the place to be. Like I mentioned earlier, the greatest key is having time on the water. I am blessed to have a great job with a great boss, and have quite a bit of vacation time. So if I do go to a big event, I usually get a full week to practice. That full week gives me the time to slow down and fish everything."

Q You don't always get to practice, especially for a lot of tournaments on the Lake of the Ozarks. How do you approach tournaments where you don't get to practice?

A "There is no substitute for time on the water. Even though I have some very good "spots", it is more of a pattern deal that comes from time on the water that wins tournaments. That is even more true on a multi-day event. If it's a one-day event I'll typically go fish history, and a lot of times I'm basically still practicing at eleven o'clock, looking for the fish to tell me what is going on. Last spring, I fished a solo tournament that I didn't get to practice for. At eleven o'clock I didn't have a keeper. I kept catching shorts on a stick bait and was getting frustrated, so I made myself pick up an A-rig and ended up catching three six pounders and a four pounder. I only caught four keepers that day, but since I did not get to practice, I had to adapt and tell myself that those

fish were in those same areas. If I really think about it, I haven't really done that well in single day events in the past year on Lake of the Ozarks. I think a lot of that is because I haven't done my due diligence and put the time on the water that I do for bigger events."

Q Your team partner, Dennis Berhorst is also a successful and well known tournament angler in the Ozark Region. Have you always fished with Dennis? And how do you guys go about making decisions as a team?

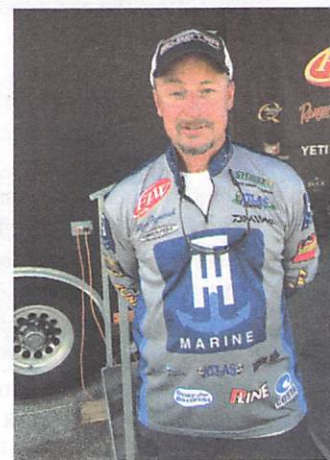
A "I mentioned that my first team partner was Mark Sneaders, and then after that I teamed up with my brother Wayne. Wayne and I fished for quite a while and did fairly well, but primarily fished up the river. When I moved to the Lake area, I just happened to get a house that was two houses down from Bruce Gier. One thing led to another and I ended up teaming up with Bruce. Bruce had a lot to do with spreading my wings and helped me realize that there were big fish that were a lot closer than the 70 mile marker. The only time me and Bruce would go up there is when we couldn't catch them down here on the lower end, and I still do that to this day. I learned that for the most part you can do just as well

fishing down here on the big water. So I fished with Bruce for a few years, and then started fishing with Dennis. Dennis and I work pretty good as a team. We have a good dynamic and are both open to what each other suggests throughout the day. One thing about Dennis is he is as good of a dock fisherman that I have ever fished with. He has tremendous confidence around those docks, and a lot of times if it is tough we revert back to that, just slowing down and fishing docks. There has hardly been a time that we have butted heads where we wanted to do different things. We usually mutually agree on what we need to do, and that makes us a good team."

Q Do you have any sponsors?

A "I have some great sponsors! Sport Boats has been outstanding to me. Anything that I have needed, they have stopped what they are doing and took care of me. Skeeter boats and Yamaha. I have been with Yamaha for ninety percent of my fishing career, and not one time in my whole career, practice day or tournament day, have I had a mechanical failure. They are just a bulletproof engine, and I could not be happier to have them on my shirt sleeve. St. Croix has been a great sponsor since day one, as with P-line. I have never

had a need to use anything else. I've been with Diawa for about ten years and love their reels. Todd Barnes created Omega Jigs, and the great thing about him was there was an innovative aspect of the company. Their new owner Brad Fuller is bringing back that innovative aspect to Omega Jigs. They are a great company with great products and I couldn't be happier to be on board with those guys. I have just recently got on board with Lowrance, and their new HDS Carbon units are awesome. The clarity on them is insane. Those really came in handy when looking for fish on Pickwick this year. Being able to see those fish with such a clear picture was pretty cool. Pole and T-H Marine have also helped a lot through the years. I have tremendous support from my family, tremendous support from my kids and my wonderful wife. My faith is my biggest sponsor. Everything that I just mentioned: my wife, my kids, my sponsors, my job. That all comes from God and I am truly grateful."



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