

Between Bites

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Harp victorious in fall kickoff derby

BY JAMES GILZOW
BETWEEN BITES EDITOR

KIMBERLING CITY, Mo. — Roger Harp found an effective solution to the late-fall dilemma of whether to fish shallow or deep. He did both — at the same time.

Working a spinner bait along sheer bluffs on the lower end of Table Rock Lake, the veteran Arkansas angler won the Central Pro-Am Association Fall Kickoff tournament Dec. 4 with five bass totaling 19.16 pounds.

For his efforts, Harp collected \$3,500, plus \$740 in big-bass winnings for his lunker of the day weighing 5.78 pounds and \$1,000 in Ranger Cup earnings.

Table Rock guide Eric Olliverson placed second in the Pro Division with 18.15 pounds and Ed Young of Harrison, Ark., was third with 17.90.

With water temperatures hanging in the mid-50s — still warm enough for bass to be chasing bait — Harp sought out wind-blown bluffs between the dam and Long Creek. His spinner bait was a green shad War Eagle half-ounce model with tandem willow-leaf blades.

“The key was to find areas where the wind had blown shad up against the bluffs,” Harp said. “I was working the



Roger Harp of Springdale, Ark., seen here in a file photo from the CCAA Pro-Am Championship held last October on Grand Lake, worked a War Eagle spinner bait and a custom-painted Wiggle Wart crank bait on bluff banks near the dam to win the 2011 fall kickoff tournament on Table Rock Lake.

bait parallel with the bluff. With that front coming through and the wind howling, it was the right kind of day for a spinner bait.”

Harp also used a custom-painted

Wiggle Wart crank bait to add a couple of keepers to his bag.

“In certain areas, they seemed to want the crank bait over the spinner

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LaPoint-Shartzter prevail in team series season opener

BY JAMES GILZOW
BETWEEN BITES EDITOR

KIMBERLING CITY, Mo. — A passing cold front didn't shut down the bite for Rick LaPoint and Gary Shartzter. They just had to add a little extra enticement to their lures.

Fishing the 2011 Central Pro-Am Association Fall Kickoff team tournament Dec. 5 on Table Rock Lake, the Missouri pair boated a five-bass limit totaling 19.45 pounds to capture first place and \$2,525. They also had the tourney's biggest single bass at 5.33 pounds, worth an additional \$570.

Most of their fish were taken by slow-rolling a 3/4-ounce

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Rick LaPoint (left) and Gary Shartzter, seen here in a file photo from 2010, won the team competition during the 2011 fall kickoff event on Table Rock Lake.



It's on us

No matter the level of competition, tournament bass anglers largely are chasing their own money. The bigger the entry fee, the more they stand to win.

It's a simple fact of life that, unlike golf or other mainstream individual sports, bass fishing simply does not carry the clout to draw millions in sponsorship dollars from corporate America.

From weeknight jackpots where fish are weighed on the tailgate of a pickup to the loftiest of pro tour events, tournament fishing is a cash-in, cash-out affair.

Take, for example, last season's Bassmaster Elite Series. The total payout for each of the eight regular-season events was \$603,000. A field of 93 paid \$5,200 each in entry fees, accounting for \$483,600 — nearly 80 percent — of that total.

Similarly, FLW Tour pros funded 83 percent of the \$725,000 payout for each of that circuit's five 2010 regular-season events.

Yes, some pro anglers have sponsors that pay their entry fees. But no matter who writes the check, entry fees still directly determine payout.

From the day in 2008 that Jim Thompson purchased Central Pro-Am Association, a primary goal of his has been to lead the organization back to the prestige it enjoyed during the glory days of the 1980s through the early 2000s.

CPAA certainly has made strides in that direction. Thompson and staff have added many new sponsors. This past off-season, Ranger Boats and Mercury Marine returned. The result will be a prize boat purchased by Jim Thompson at a deep discount, to be awarded by drawing at season's end.

"This is a huge step in getting Central Pro-Am back where it should be," Thompson said. "We're getting there."

Nevertheless, the bottom line comes down to angler numbers.

Just as participation determines payout, it has a major impact on sponsorship. Firms large or small are far more

likely to invest promotional dollars in a circuit that draws 100 or more boats every event than one that draws 50. Furthermore, a larger circuit can reasonably expect more in terms of monetary value from sponsors.

I'm as guilty as anyone of grouching about low payout on occasion. It's hard not to grumble sometimes, especially when fueling the truck or boat, paying the hotel or dinner bill, or picking up a few last-minute supplies at the tackle shop.

But the faithful really can't expect numbers to grow if we are focused on the problem instead of the solution. Yes, Jim Thompson is the legal owner of Central Pro-Am Association. But in the practical sense, it belongs to us — the fishermen. And if the glory days are going to return, it's up to us to beat the drums and make every effort to promote CPAA in our personal travels and at home.

Bottom line: For more cash to be paid out, more has to come in via increased entries. And as the circuit grows, so will the involvement of existing and potential major sponsors, resulting in more and better prizes.

It's on us, folks.

★ ★ ★

Welcome to the online debut of *Between Bites*, the official newsletter of Central Pro-Am Association.

The decision to go online with some editions of *Between Bites* was driven by several factors, but mostly convenience. With access to the Internet so widely available these days, CPAA members can view the newsletter practically anywhere, anytime by visiting www.centralpro-am.com.

Between Bites will contain comprehensive coverage of CPAA tournaments, along with important information about upcoming events and other news of interest to CPAA members.

Details are still being worked out, but a couple of print editions per year also are planned.

Between Bites

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bait," he said. "But the three biggest ones came on the spinner bait."

Harp's sponsors include Ranger Boats, War Eagle Custom Lures, Arkie Lures, Bass Medics and Auto Body Supply Inc in Springdale, Ark.

OLLIVERTON SECOND

Olliverson began fishing near the dam, too, and his day started off in promising fashion with a heavyweight bass of more than 5 pounds. However, when 10 a.m. rolled around and he hadn't added to his creel, it was time for a change.

"I ended up just scrapping everything and heading up the James [River]," he said. "A guide client and I had been up there a week earlier and caught them pretty good on a buzz bait."

Conceding that the fish might not come up for a buzz bait in the cold front conditions, Olliverson tied on a Damiki DC200 crank bait with a custom paint job by Fall Creek Lures.

"I just got on the windiest banks I could find and kept cranking," he said. "I did catch one keeper under a dock on a 5/16-ounce Jewel jig, but the rest of them came on the crank bait."

Olliverson earned \$2,200 for the runner-up finish. His sponsors include Damiki Fishing Tackle, Yum, Berkley, Abu-Garcia and Bass Pro Shops.

YOUNG THIRD

Young said his day couldn't have gone any better — short of culling up just a bit more.

Beginning his efforts in Fisher Creek, practically within sight of takeoff, he had two bass in the livewell before the last boat was under way.

"I hadn't caught anything on a crank bait all week in practice," he said. "But I picked up a Wiggle Wart first thing that morning and they jumped all over it. I had a 4-pound largemouth and a keeper spot in the first few minutes."

At his next stop, also near Kimberling City, he added three more keepers to fill out his limit. All of those also came on the custom-painted Wiggle Wart.

Young went on to catch 20 keepers by day's end, all on the Wiggle Wart.

"I was targeting the windiest banks I could find," he said. "That was key, and I think another key was dropping down to 8-pound line. That let me get the bait a little deeper and helped me feel the bite better."

Young earned \$1,200. He is sponsored by Jewel Bait Co. and Battery Outfitters.

CO-ANGLER DIVISION

Like the top pro anglers, Zach Robbins of Branson, Mo., relied on a spinner bait and crank bait to bag his three-bass limit totaling 10.83 pounds.



Robbins

Paired with pro Greg Ryan of nearby Nixa, Robbins scored his first keeper of more than 4 pounds on a green shad War Eagle spinner bait about 10 a.m. The remainder of his catch came on a Wiggle Wart in the green crawfish factory finish.

"We were paralleling windy banks," Robbins said. "That big fish hit my spinner bait really close to the boat, then just went wild. It was pretty exciting there for a minute."

The 4.52-pound lunker was worth big-bass bonus of \$320 on top of his winner's check of \$1,500. He is sponsored by Bass Pro Shops, Tracker Marine and War Eagle Custom Lures.

Craig Dort of Rogersville, Mo., relied on a late-afternoon flurry to finish second among the co-anglers, bagging a three-bass limit totaling 9.73 pounds.

At midafternoon, Dort had not caught a keeper but stayed true to his Wiggle Wart that had been custom painted by friend Andy Lemon. The decision paid off with a 45-minute flurry in which he caught four keepers, culling to his final weight.

Dort earned \$1,140 for his efforts. He is sponsored by Seaguar, Lew's, Johnstone Supply and Aero Dry Carpet Cleaning.

Bryan Tracy of St. Peters, Mo., managed to glean enough remaining bass behind Pro Division champ Roger Harp to place third among the co-anglers.

Using a mouse-colored War Eagle spinner bait and a firetiger-colored Wiggle Wart, Tracy landed three bass for 8.85 pounds, worth \$800.

"Roger was having to keep the boat right against the bluff to catch his fish, so that made it tough for me," Tracy said. "But he let me get in enough casts to catch what I did and I was grateful for that. He kept apologizing all day for having me cut off."

"The key when I did get in a good cast was to slow-roll the spinner bait or reel the crank bait right across the little outcroppings in the bluff. That's where the fish were."

Tracy is sponsored by RaZr Rods.

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War Eagle spinner bait with a blue pearl shad skirt. LaPoint, a well-known Table Rock guide, said the addition of a chartreuse curl-tail trailer by Luck-E-Strike Lures was critical.

"We started in Mill Creek (near Kimberling City) and ended up catching our four biggest keepers in there," he said. "We didn't start out using the chartreuse trailer, but as soon as I put on one, I caught a good keeper. Then Gary put one on and started catching them."

Table Rock guides Bill Beck of Kimberling City and Bill Babler of nearby Blue Eye teamed up to take second place with 16.37 pounds, while yet another Missouri duo — Rick Scarberry of Lamar and Bryan Tracy of St. Peters — placed third with 15.93 pounds.

Around mid-day, LaPoint and Shartzter decided to move to the James River in hopes of upgrading their catch. Using Wiggle Warts, they were able to catch half a dozen more keepers and cull once, but not before changing colors.

"We had been throwing red and not getting bit," Shartzter said. "Rick switched over to a chartreuse one and caught a keeper within 10 casts."

"We all know that color can be important at times, but it was really key today."

LaPoint and Shartzter are sponsored by Ranger Boats, Humminbird, Yamaha Outboards, RaZr Rods, Seaguar and Uncle Josh.

Babler and Beck fished all week prior to the tourney and were leaning toward not entering until Beck located a motherlode of fish about five minutes from the takeoff site at Ahoy's.

"Beck called me Friday and said he was really on a big bunch," Babler said. "Up to that point, all we had going was a fair bite on a jerk bait up the (White) River."

The school of fish that Beck had located were biting best from mid-morning on, so the two guides started their day throwing spinner baits on windy flats near takeoff. That produced three keepers, all of which they would cull later.

Once the sun was up above the trees, Babler and Beck went to work on their deep pattern, targeting the "guts of deep

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CURRENT PARTNERS



FAMILY OF COMPANIES



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coves” between Kimberling City and the Indian Point area near the dam. All of their fish were caught on a white, half-ounce War Eagle jigging spoon.

The bass were positioned around giant balls of shad.

“We had one particular spot that was just loaded with fish,” Babler said. “We caught over 100 fish that day easily and had 50 to 60 keepers. I don’t think we ever lost a fish. We ended up with all largemouth but we just couldn’t ever get a big bite to bump our weight up above 16 pounds.”

Babler and Beck are sponsored by Falcon Rods and War Eagle Custom Lures.

Scarberry and Tracy were among the spinner bait-and-Wiggle Wart crowd,

using both to score a high finish in their first team event together.

The two keys for them were ledge rock and wind.

“I got on that ledge rock bite the first five minutes of the first day of practice,” Scarberry said. “The wind helped, but the ledge rock was the key factor.”

The pair started the day throwing War Eagle spinner baits and Tracy scored back-to-back keepers from a bluff end with cedars.

Later in the morning, they started raking the ledge rock banks with Wiggle Warts and stayed with it the rest of the day. Their particular choice was a custom-painted peanut butter and jelly color by Fall Creek Lures.

“It was one of the easiest patterns I’ve ever found,” Scarberry said. “It didn’t seem to matter if you were on the main lake or back in the creeks as long as you had that ledge rock between 4 and 10 feet. We were just bumping those Wiggle Warts down the ledges.

“Southern banks were three times better than other banks because with the days being short that time of year, they had a little shade on them a good part of the day. And with the cold front coming through, they also had the north wind blowing in on them.”

Sponsors of Scarberry and Tracy include Luck-E-Strike Lures, Pro-Guide Batteries, War Eagle Custom Lures and Midwest Radar.



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