

# Florida flair helps Cliff Prince win his first Bassmaster Elite Series trophy at Wheeler Lake after adversities

DECATUR, Ala. — Cliff Prince has suffered several difficult defeats in his 12-year career on the Bassmaster Elite Series, but this week he made sure he wasn't going to beat himself. By catching 15 pounds, 2 ounces on Championship Sunday, Prince collected his first Elite Series victory at the Whataburger Bassmaster Elite at Wheeler Lake with a four-day total of 80-15. He survived a hard charge from Ray Hanselman Jr. on the final day to

*"I've been close several times and I let it slip through my fingers," Prince said. "I told myself, 'I'm not going to beat myself this week. If I'm going to get beat, it is going to be by somebody else, not me. I think I did that. I accomplished what I set out to do once I saw that I had a chance to win.'"*

hoist the blue trophy and earn a \$100,000 payday.

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Throughout his career, Prince admittedly does not have a great track record on the Tennessee River, including a 105th-place finish on this particular lake when the Elites last visited in 2016. With that in mind, Prince wanted to come into this event with a clean slate and did not study for Wheeler before arriving.

"I was hoping to survive," Prince said. "I know how to ledge fish, and this time of year I do well at home. But this is way different than at home. I don't have all the secret hidey holes."

"To beat these guys outside of your own state that means you got it done."

All week, Prince maximized one main-lake sweet spot on the Decatur Flats. That spot featured



**Cliff Prince of Palatka, Fla., wins the Whataburger Bassmaster Elite at Wheeler Lake with a four-day total of 20 bass for 80 pounds, 15 ounces. (Photo by Seigo Saito/B.A.S.S.)**

two prominent hard spots surrounded by submergent grass. While a 4-pound smallmouth on Day 1 came specifically out of the grass, the rest of his bites came from those hard spots.

To get to those bass, Prince needed to incorporate his Florida flair. He tossed a white/chartreuse Z-Man Evergreen JackHammer with a snow storm-colored Bass Assassin Little Boss trailer and reeled it slowly through the grass and over the hard spots.

His casting setup was a 7-foot-3 medium Fitzgerald baitcasting rod, a 7:4 gear ratio Shimano reel and 17-pound Seagaur Tatsu fluorocarbon.

"That's kind of what we do at home. It was right up my alley," he said. "The slower you could fish it the better. If you could keep it on the bottom with a slight wobble, that is when they would eat it. Sometimes they would eat it on the fall for whatever reason. If you threw it and started cranking, they would not eat it. You had to let it hit the bottom."

He also mixed in a 7-inch green pumpkin Bass Assassin Tapout worm on a 1/8-ounce Texas Rig

from time to time, landing several key bass with it. He fished that bait on a 6-10 Fitzgerald medium-heavy spinning rod with 20-pound Seagaur Smackdown braid and a 15-pound Tatsu fluorocarbon leader.

The first three days, Prince caught early limits of 19-4, 20-7 and then a remarkable 26-2, which stood as the Rapala CrushCity Monster Bag of the Tournament. Championship Sunday was no different, as Prince landed his biggest bass of Day 4, a 4-pounder, just seven minutes after leaving takeoff at Ingalls Harbor at 6 a.m.

He filled his limit at 6:32 a.m. and 20 minutes later, he capitalized on another flurry and culled twice. Prince added a 2 1/2-pounder close to 8:30, but the following hours were agonizing, as he did not hook another bass before 2 p.m.

"Obviously they didn't bite as well as they did the days before," he said. "For whatever reason they didn't bite when the wind was blowing. It blew pretty much all day. Yesterday when I really crushed them, it was slick

calm." The wait was well worth it, as the "Prince of Palatka" landed a 4-pounder as his family watched from a pontoon boat.

That fish was obviously a pound upgrade, and a pound in this tournament is a lot," Prince said. "They were all whooping and hollering. That bass right there, I went from 13 1/2 to 15."

Catching bags of 15-8, 17-12 and 20-7 the first three days and entering the final day with a 12-pound deficit, Hanselman made a heroic comeback in the final round by landing 23-5 Sunday.

During the first hour of the day, the veteran pro from Del Rio, Texas, landed two bass over 5 pounds and filled his limit by 7 a.m. A half hour later, he caught another 5-pounder and added several more key bass by 9:30 a.m. to secure his best finish as an Elite Series angler.

"I had a feeling they were going to be there," Hanselman said. "I

just started out catching them. I wanted them to get going fast and furious with a moving bait like a big squarebill, but the first one that nipped it, I reeled it in reel fast and picked up a worm and hammered on them."

Most of Hanselman's bass were caught off a shellbar he stumbled on during Day 1 as he was targeting isolated stumps. He started on that spot the final three days of the tournament, catching numerous quality bass using several 6th Sense presentations including a Crush 50X squarebill, a prototype crankbait, a 6th Sense Flock Hair Jig and a 6th Sense Boosa ribbontail worm on a 3/8-ounce Texas rig.

"I was radio silent all week. No forward-facing sonar, just my map and a big worm," Hanselman said.

As part of the Yamaha Power Pay program, Hanselman earned an additional \$4,000. With bags of 22-2, 12-11, 17-12

and 17-15, Florida's John Cox finished third with a total of 70-8. It is the first Top 10 of the season for an angler known for always plying the shallows. He also earned \$2,000 for being the second-highest placing entrant in the Toyota Bonus Bucks program.

"We made the most of it," he said. "I was super fortunate with the weather and how the bass were really holding tight to the milfoil. It helped tremendously. I don't know how it would have played out if the weather would have been different."

Cox spent most of his tournament inside a backwater pond on Wheeler Lake that featured a big milfoil mat. A shad-colored Berkley Swamp Lord frog was his weapon of choice.

"I couldn't move the trolling motor because it seemed like anytime I did, it seemed to throw the whole area off," he explained. "I would just drift in and Power Pole down."

Prince and Louisiana pro Greg Hackney tied for Phoenix Boats Big Bass of the Tournament honors after both anglers landed 7-9 largemouth, Hackney on Day 1 and Prince on Day 3. Prince also earned a \$3,000 bonus for being the highest-finishing angler in the Toyota Bonus Bucks program.

Hawaiian pro Matty Wong earned the \$1,000 BassTrakk contingency prize for accurate reporting during the first two days of the tournament.

Carbondale, Ill., rookie Trey McKinney continues to lead the Progressive Bassmaster Angler of the Year standings with 560 points. Alabama's Justin Hamner is second with 501 points, followed by Missouri's Cody Huff in third with 474, Tennessee's Jacob Foutz in fourth with 473 and Canadian pro Chris Johnston in fifth with 470.

McKinney also leads the Dakota Lithium Bassmaster Rookie of the Year standings, followed by Tennessee's John Garrett in second with 460 points and Alabama's Wesley Gore in third.

## Chandler Martin named to Phil Steele's Fourth-Team Preseason All-American

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — After a standout 2023 campaign, University of Memphis linebacker Chandler Martin was named to Phil Steele's 2024 Fourth-Team Preseason All-America team.

Along with Martin, 14 other Tigers were named to the publication's preseason All-AAC team. The announcement was made on June 11. Last season, Martin led Memphis with 95 tackles, 17 tackles for loss, three sacks, and two forced fumbles en route to being named First-Team All-AAC. He also added two interceptions, two pass breakups, three quarterback hurries, and one fumble recovery on the year.

Martin finished 17th in the NCAA in tackles for loss and 18th in solo tackles (5.1).

Along with Martin, quarterback Seth Henigan, wide receiver Roc Taylor, offensive lineman Xavier

Hill (OG), and running back Sutton Smith (KR) were named to Phil Steele's First-Team Preseason All-AAC team.

Running back Mario Anderson, wide receiver Demeer Blankumsee, and tight end Anthony Landphere were named to the second-team preseason squad, while offensive lineman Jonah Gambill (OG), linebacker Elijah Herring, defensive back Greg Rubin (S), kicker Caden Costa, and long snapper Colby Cox were named to the third team. DB Tahj Ra-El (CB) and wide receiver Koby Drake (PR) were both named fourth-team preseason all-conference.

Memphis football fans can see the Tigers at Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium in the team's season opener on Saturday, Aug. 31 with a four-pack of tickets that includes a parking pass for only \$49. The season opener against

North Alabama is the annual "901 Game," and the 901 Game Four-Pack can be purchased by visiting [www.GotigersGo.com](http://www.GotigersGo.com)

Supplies for the 901 Game Four-Pack are limited, so fans should take advantage of this opportunity while inventory remains. The cost of the 901 Game Four-Pack will increase to \$69 on July 1 and \$89 on Aug. 1 if supplies remain.

To catch all of the action in the highly-anticipated 2024 Memphis Football season, fans can also purchase season tickets at [GoTigersGo.com](http://GoTigersGo.com), in person at the Memphis Ticket Office or by calling the office at (901) 678-2331.

For complete information on Memphis Tigers Football, visit [www.GoTigersGo.com](http://www.GoTigersGo.com) and follow the team's social media channels on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

## Tennessee State Parks will hold work events at 33 state parks

NASHVILLE — Tennessee State Parks will hold work events at 33 parks across the state this month for Tennessee Promise scholars to fulfill their community service hours.

Most parks will hold their events on Saturday June 22. Radnor Lake State Park will have two sessions on Friday, June 21, and Roan Mountain State Park will welcome students on June 22-23 as part of its 77th annual Rhododendron Festival.

Details for all the parks involved can be found online at this link. All participants must register on the website. The parks also accept help from any other volunteers who wish to participate. "We welcome everyone to these events, and we are excited to be part of the Tennessee Promise program each year," said Commissioner David Salyers of the

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Activities for the workday at various parks include removing invasive exotic species and re-

claiming the old homestead site at Edgar Evins State Park; assisting in the setup, custodial work, and cleanup for the Summer Square Dance at Alvin C. York State Historic Park; trail building and maintenance at Paris Landing State Park; and cleanup along a trail at Chickasaw State Park.

Participants are encouraged to wear appropriate clothing for the work and bring items such as water, snacks, and sunscreen.

Tennessee Promise provides students the chance to attend tuition-free any of the state's community colleges, colleges of applied technology, or other eligible institutions offering an associate degree program. One of the requirements to maintain eligibility is to complete eight hours of community service.

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