

Bassmaster Elite Series event at Smith Lake could be a mystery for anglers in central Alabama hotbed

CULLMAN, Ala. — Though he won't be competing in the 2024 TNT Fireworks Bassmaster Elite at Smith Lake, David Kilgore knows a thing or two when it comes to fishing this central Alabama hotbed.

The 50-year-old Jasper, Ala., resident is known as something of a wizard on the lake, having won a Bassmaster Southern Open tournament here a decade ago — one of four B.A.S.S. victories in his lengthy career, and all coming in his home state. Kilgore is a fierce stick on Smith, and he proved it by winning consecutive one-day derbies on the 21,000-acre fishery last month.

So how does the hometown ace, who's currently fishing the St. Croix Bassmaster Opens presented by SEVIIN, think his favorite fishery will perform when 99 Elite anglers compete here June 27-30?

"No one knows really," he said. "It's a mystery."

Kilgore's not being coy or trying to keep the world's best bass anglers from hitting his Smith Lake honey holes. Not at all. He said he really isn't sure what the Elite Series crew should expect later this month.

And why?

"This tournament is pretty late in the season and there have already been a lot of tournaments in there this year," he said. "I won two up there with 15.8 and 17 pounds a month ago. But the 15- and 16-inch spotted bass the place was filled with three or four years ago, those 3 1/2- and 4-pounders, they've been much harder to find."

"So, I think you're gonna see a lot of 9-, 10- (and) 11-pound bags



Summertime temperatures and spotted bass will highlight the TNT Fireworks Bassmaster Elite at Smith Lake June 27-30. (Photo by Shane Durrance/B.A.S.S.)

coming in. The bass have been a bit smaller, and while that may be promising for the future, it's not especially great for right now."

Kilgore suspects the best bags will come from anglers who locate pockets of herring off points in the lake. He assumes most anglers will be using forward-facing sonar and thinks key offshore bites could play a role, too.

The scalding Alabama heat should also play a role, and likely in more ways than one.

"Thursday and Friday fishing should be OK, but by Saturday, boats are going to be everywhere on the water," he said. "I took off recently from Cullman about 5

a.m. with no problem, but when I got back at noon, it was absolute chaos over there. The recreational boat traffic on the weekend — the ski boats, the Jet Skis — those boats are throwing big wakes.

"They're not doing it because they're mad at us or anything. They just don't realize how a 4-foot wave can knock you around in a bass boat. They'll smile and wave as they zip by. It'll be interesting to see how the LiveScopers handle that, trying to hold a spot on a fish when they're bouncing around out there."

Kilgore thinks anglers with early bites will have the best

chance. When the summer sun gets overhead, though, he thinks action could slow to a crawl.

"If there's some chop out there, they could be OK," he said. "But if it's slick, it could be a long day for a lot of guys. I'd fish super-shallow early, looking for a largemouth bite on a bluff. You might get a couple hours out of that. Then I'd fish every point I know, LiveScoping with a top-water bait like a Strike King Sexy Dawg. I might try a Fluke-style bait if I need to be under the water a little bit."

As for a winning weight, Kilgore made a conservative estimate.

"I think 15 pounds a day wins it, unless someone finds the mother lode of big spots out there," he said. "But if I had 15 pounds a day, I'd be thrilled."

Only time will tell if competitors will feel the same come tournament time.

The TNT Fireworks Bassmaster Elite at Smith Lake will begin at 6 a.m. CT each day from Smith Lake Park in Cullman. Weigh-ins are scheduled for 2 p.m. The full field will fish for the first two days of the derby with a cut to the Top 50 on Day 3 and to the Top 10 on the final day. Fans can follow the action live on Bass-

Bassmaster LIVE will be streaming on Bassmaster.com all four days, and coverage will also be available on FS1 on Saturday at 7:00-10:00 a.m. and Sunday at 7:00-12:00 p.m.

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VisitCullman.com is hosting the tournament.

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B.A.S.S. is headquartered in Birmingham, Ala. and the 500,000-member organization's fully integrated media platforms include the industry's leading magazines (Bassmaster and B.A.S.S. Times), website (Bassmaster.com), TV show, radio show, social media programs and events.

For more than 50 years, B.A.S.S. has been dedicated to access, conservation and youth fishing.

2,000+ players will participate in NFL Flag Championships Presented by Toyota to promote youth sports ... from sports page 1

perience while visiting the Hall of Fame Village campus, beginning with introductions of the teams and coaches on opening night. Teams will also tour the Pro Football Hall of Fame, which includes its first flag football exhibit, to educate players about the history of football.

"The NFL Flag Championships presented by Toyota, being held at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, in Canton, Ohio, amplifies the goal for this tournament and for the NFL," said Stephanie Kwok, vice president of Flag Football. "This championship will showcase highly competitive games with competition from all 32 NFL clubs around the country. It also exemplifies that flag football at the grassroots level is inclusive and accessible, every girl or boy that wants to play will have every opportunity to play this game."

In February, ESPN signed a five-year media rights deal that will broadcast the tournaments each year. The network will broadcast 32 hours of live coverage of the highly competitive 18U girls and the much anticipated 15U boys single elimination tournaments across the three-day championship event, with at least six hours on linear television each day. Games will

be distributed broadly across ESPN, Disney and NFL touchpoints including Spanish-language coverage of the semifinals and championships. While each game will be available on ESPN+ and NFL+, 20 games will stream on YouTube and six games will also be available on ESPN, with an additional four games available on ESPN2. On Sunday, the platforms for the championship finals will expand to include additional Disney platforms, with both the boys and girls' games airing on ABC, Disney Channel, Disney XD and ESPN Deportes and streaming on Disney+, ESPN+ and NFL+. Six games across the three days will also air on NFL Network.

The NFL Flag Championships will be available in over 125 countries, including live coverage available in Mexico, Brazil, throughout Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Fans in the Netherlands, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands will also be able to consume coverage of the event on ESPN branded networks.

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senior vice president of league programming and acquisitions. "Through our presentation and robust global distribution, we will spotlight the highly talented boys and girls within the tournament, while also highlighting the exciting, inclusive, and accessible nature of the sport. We look forward to being a gateway for many fans, including the peers of the participating athletes, to experience competitive flag football for the first time."

Toyota is the Presenting Partner of NFL Flag tournaments across the U.S. — spanning the NFL Flag Championships and Regional Tournaments as well as NFL Flag League Play. At the NFL Flag Championships presented by Toyota this July in Canton, Ohio, Toyota will have a cobranded presence on all NFL

Flag jerseys and flags, as well as signage and activation space at Fan Fest. Toyota will also sponsor ESPN and Disney's live broadcast coverage of the top boys (18U) and girls (15U) divisions in the tournament.

"The NFL Flag Championships presented by Toyota will show football players emerging as stars across different ages and genders," said Dave Christ, group vice president and general manager of the Toyota Division at Toyota Motor North America, Inc. "Our sponsorship aims to support the sport from grassroots to elite levels, culminating in showcasing the live television debut of these young talents at Canton."

Subway has been a proud sponsor of NFL Flag since 2020 thanks to a shared commitment to keep youth active. They will continue their support as an official sponsor of NFL Flag Championships, appearing on flag belts and field signage.

Visa, an official sponsor of NFL

Flag Championships, will be the presenting sponsor of the Flag Coach of the Year Award. This award honors coaches who serve the best interest of the game, motivate their players to achieve, and are dedicated to their communities. Through this partnership, Visa continues its mission to foster inclusivity, championing women's sports and female athletes.

Oakley has been a proud partner of NFL Flag since 2023 spanning the NFL Flag Championships and Regional Tournaments as well as NFL Flag League Play. As a part of the brand's continued support, Oakley will be present in Canton with on-site activations and a retail space at the NFL Flag Fan Fest and will honor the best-of-the-best with the "Oakley Future of Flag" team. For the third year in row, Oakley will engage with young athletes and equip them with best-in-class eyewear for use on and off the field.

The tournament structure will begin with pool play on Thurs-

day, July 18. On Friday, there will be a round of 16 for two age groups and pool play for designated age groups. On Saturday, there will be quarter finals and playoffs. Sunday, the last day of the tournament, will include semi-finals and finals.

RCX is the sole operator of NFL Flag, responsible for producing the four-day competition. RCX is the premier youth sports experience business and facilitates flag football opportunities for athletes of all ages, genders, and economic backgrounds from around the world.

"The NFL Flag Championships presented by Toyota will be a wonderful opportunity for these athletes to play flag football on the biggest stage they've ever experienced," said Izell Reese, CEO of RCX Sports and executive director of NFL Flag. "I'm so proud of each of these athletes for chasing their dreams in Ohio, and I'm grateful to our

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