

Japanese rookie sensation Kyoya Fujita wins Dakota Lithium Bassmaster Elite event on Lake Champlain

PLATTSBURGH, N.Y. — The big bites mostly eluded Kyoya Fujita, but the Elite rookie's diligence delivered the coveted blue trophy, as the Japanese superstar amassed the winning total of 86 pounds, 12 ounces in the Dakota Lithium Bassmaster Elite at Lake Champlain.

"This feels great!" Fujita said. "My dream (has been) to win an Elite Series tournament. My dream came true."

After placing 10th on Day 1 with 21-5, Fujita added 23-14 — the VMC Monster Bag of the event — and took over the Day 2 lead. Fujita held onto the top spot with a Semifinal Sunday limit of 22-9 and closed the deal with his Championship Monday bag that weighed 19 pounds.

The week brought a diverse meteorological mix, which included a storm system that postponed Day 2 from Friday to Saturday. Days 1 and 3 brought mostly sunny conditions, while the even number days saw dimmer, cloudy skies. Wind was a constant challenge.

Heavily geared toward sight feeding, smallmouth like sunshine, so Championship Monday's dreary conditions, plus a week's worth of heavy fishing pressure, seemed to be curbing the fish's aggression. After three days with multiple 4-pounders, Fujita had only one fish over 4 Monday and fell short of the 20-pound mark for the first time. "It was a struggle today," Fujita said. "I got on a school of fish (later in the day) and they wouldn't bite. I kept dropping on them and finally a big one bit my bait on the way down."

A multiple-event winner and four-time Angler of the Year on the Japanese professional bass scene, Fujita edged third-year pro Justin Atkins by 1-6. For his efforts, Fujita won the \$100,000 top prize plus a \$2,000 bonus for



Kyoya Fujita of Minamitsuru, Japan, has won the Dakota Lithium Bassmaster Elite at Lake Champlain with a four-day total of 86 pounds, 12 ounces. (Photo by Seigo Saito/B.A.S.S.)

catching the VMC Monster Bag.

Making his fourth Top 10 for the 2023 Elite season, Fujita spent his entire event in the Inland Sea, where he used Garmin LiveScope to target smallmouth bass that were following schools of baitfish. Mostly targeting the east side of Dameas and Knight islands, Fujita worked in depths of 12 to 30 feet.

"I found a big-fish area in practice," Fujita said. "I found the bass first, then I found the bait."

Fujita caught his fish on a drop shot with a 4.5-inch Jackall Yammy stickworm cut down to approximately 3 inches and a Damiki-style rig with a 5.2-inch Jackall Revoltage RV-Drift Fry

on a 1/8-ounce ball-head jig.

Notably, Fujita's tournament got off to a rocky start, as a mechanical issue limited his fishing time. He made up ground on Day 2 and continued expanding on his area for the next three days.

Day 4 saw Fujita briefly departing his main waters, as he visited the west side of the Inland Sea and fished the City Reef area. Fujita caught fish there, but none of them contributed to his final weight.

After summarizing his day, Fujita closed with a crowd-charming farewell: "Thank you Daiwa and Jackall and the many Japanese and the American (sponsors) and the Bassmaster crew."

Finishing second with 85-6, Atkins kept himself near the top all week. He placed fourth on Day 1 with 22-6, then slipped to sixth after weighing 21-6. Atkins' Day 3 bag of 21-3 lifted him to third. His final-round limit weighed 20-7.

Hailing from Florence, Ala., Atkins caught all of his fish on a 1/4-ounce underspin with a Berkley MaxScent Flatworm. He fished a dark-colored bait during dim conditions, while a white bait excelled during sunny times. His darker bait carried a gold willow-leaf blade, while the white version had a silver blade.

"I caught a few on the dark color this morning when it was

cloudy and when the sun came out, I caught them on the light color again," Atkins said. "I didn't catch quite enough weight on it, but it was a good program."

Atkins fished the Inland Sea and focused on an area where deep water swung close to a water cabbage edge. This, he said, was the zone where he found his biggest bass chasing bait in practice.

Cody Huff of Ava, Mo., finished third with 85-5. His daily limits weighed 23-3, 20-10, 21-2 and 20-6.

Fishing the Inland Sea, Huff committed to a straightforward game plan based on his dual prowess with forward-facing sonar and the Damiki rig. His rig com-

prised a 1/8- to 1/2-ounce VMC Slick Jighead with a 5-inch Strike King 3X Z-Too. The larger profile seemed to trigger the bigger fish.

"The key was just to keep moving, throw at as many fish as you could throw at and the aggressive ones would get it," Huff said. "Normally, if you get a calm day, you cast to them out there at 60 to 80 feet and you catch a lot more of them."

"When it was windy, there was a lot of noise from waves slapping the boat, so a lot of them were coming really close."

Jacob Foutz of Charleston, Tenn., took home the Day 4 Phoenix Boats Big Bass and an additional \$1,000 for his 4-13. Jay Przekurat of Stevens Point, Wis., and Mark Menendez of Paducah, Ky., shared the \$2,000 prize for the overall Phoenix Boats Big Bass of the tournament. Each angler weighed a 5-4. Jason Christie still has a firm grip on the \$10,000 check for Phoenix Boats Big Bass of the year with his 9-4 Lay Lake largemouth.

Huff took home an additional \$3,000 for being the highest-placing entrant in the Toyota Bonus Bucks program while Ohio angler Alex Redwine, who made his first Top 10 this week, earned \$2,000 for being the second-highest placing entrant.

As part of the Yamaha Power Pay program, Atkins earned an additional \$2,500 as the highest-placing entrant and Patrick Walters of Summerville, S.C., claimed an additional \$1,500 for being the second-highest placing entrant.

Austin Felix of Eden Prairie, Minn., won the \$1,000 BassTrakk Contingency award for the most accurate weight reporting.

Grizzlies announce 2023-24 regular season schedule; Tickets now on sale ... from sports page 1

South Ford Dealers, as the team hosts Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors at 5 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 15. The game will be televised regionally on **Bally Sports Southeast, Bally Sports+, the Bally Sports app and BallySports.com**, broadcast nationally on TNT and carried on the Grizzlies' flagship station 92.9 FM ESPN Radio and across the Grizzlies Radio Network.

Fans are encouraged to guarantee their seats to the best regular season matchups with 2023-24 Season Tickets starting at \$15 per game. Those who wish to purchase Season Tickets may do so now by calling (901) 888-HOOP and speaking with an Account Executive. Tickets for all single games will go on sale today at 4 p.m. at grizzlies.com. MVPs will have early access to the sale at 3 p.m. Purchase limit of four tickets per game will apply.

On Tuesday, the NBA announced the Grizzlies' schedule for the NBA In-Season Tournament, a new annual competition for all 30 teams that will debut in



the 2023-24 regular season. Consisting of two stages — Group Play and the Knockout Rounds — the inaugural tournament will tip-off in NBA team markets on Friday, Nov. 3, and will culminate with the Semifinals on Thursday, Dec. 7, and Championship on Saturday, Dec. 9, at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. The 22 teams that do not qualify for the Knockout Rounds will each play two regular season games on Wednesday, Dec. 6, and Friday, Dec. 8; the four teams that lose in the Quarterfinals (played in NBA team markets on Monday, Dec. 4, and Tuesday, Dec. 5) also will play one regular season game on Friday, Dec. 8.

Memphis' four In-Season Tour-

namment Group Play games are as follows: Friday, Nov. 3, at **Portland**; Friday, Nov. 10, vs. **Utah**; Tuesday, Nov. 14, at **LA Lakers**; and Friday, Nov. 24, vs. **Phoenix**.

The Grizzlies will play nine total home games (including the home opener and two Group Play home games) through the end of November, including the following matchups: 2023 NBA Finals MVP **Nikola Jokic and the 2023 NBA champion Denver Nuggets** on Friday, Oct. 27; **Luka Doncic and the Dallas Mavericks** on Monday, Oct. 30; **Jimmy Butler and the Miami Heat** on Wednesday, Nov. 8; and Jayson Tatum and the Boston Celtics on Sunday, Nov. 19. Memphis will have a season-high six-day, three-game home stand from Nov. 24-29, hosting Kevin Durant and the Suns on Friday, Nov. 24, in Phoenix's only trip to Memphis, Anthony Edwards and the Minnesota Timberwolves on Sunday, Nov. 26, and Lauri Markkanen and the Utah Jazz on Wednesday, Nov. 29.

Memphis will host **Dillon Brooks and the Houston Rockets** on Friday, Dec. 15, and will ring in the New Year with three home games in four nights against De'Aaron Fox and the Sacramento Kings on Sunday, Dec. 31, No. 1 overall pick in the 2023 NBA Draft **Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs** on Tuesday, Jan. 2, and **Pascal Siakam and the Toronto Raptors** on Wednesday, Jan. 3.

The Grizzlies also will play three home games in four nights on two other occasions before the 2024 NBA All-Star break. Memphis will face **Paul George and the LA Clippers** on Friday, Jan. 12, **Jalen Brunson and the New York Knicks** on Saturday, Jan. 13, and **Curry and the Warriors on Monday, Jan. 15, in the 22nd Annual MLK Day Celebration Game**. Memphis then will take on **Zion Williamson and the Pelicans** on Monday, Feb. 12, the Rockets on Wednesday, Feb. 14, and Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks on Thursday, Feb. 15. Memphis' post All-Star schedule includes a tilt with **Tyus Jones**

and the **Washington Wizards** on Tuesday, March 12, two home meetings with **LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers** on Wednesday, March 27, and Friday, April 12, a matchup with 2022-23 NBA MVP **Joel Embiid and the Philadelphia 76ers** on Saturday, April 6, and a second home contest with **Jokic and the Nuggets** in the regular season finale on Sunday, April 14. Five of the Grizzlies' final six regular season games will be played at FedExForum.

Including the to-be-determined Knockout Rounds of the In-Season Tournament, the Grizzlies will play 56 games before the 2024 **NBA All-Star Game** — which will be played Sunday, Feb. 18, at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis — and 26 games after the All-Star break.

Not including the to-be-determined Knockout Rounds of the In-Season Tournament, Memphis will play 20 home games on the weekend (12 on Friday, four on Saturday and four on Sunday) and will play 14 back-to-back sets (including seven home-home

back-to-backs that include no travel between games).

The Grizzlies will embark on their longest road trip — four games over eight days — from March 18-25, part of an eight-game stretch from March 18-April 3 in which Memphis will play seven games away from home. The team will travel an estimated overall total distance of 43,000 miles this season.

No games will be played on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 7, as part of the NBA family's focus on promoting nonpartisan civic engagement and encouraging fans to make a plan to vote.

Memphis will tip-off its five-game preseason schedule with two home games on Sunday, Oct. 8, against the Indiana Pacers and Tuesday, Oct. 10, against the Bucks before traveling for three road exhibitions on Thursday, Oct. 12, against the Atlanta Hawks, Sunday, Oct. 15, at Miami and Friday, Oct. 20, at Milwaukee. Both preseason home games will tip-off at 7 p.m.

Memphis Hustle to hold auditions for Hustle Hype Crew at FedExForum

-Auditions to be held in September at FedExForum-

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — The Memphis Hustle, the NBA G League affiliate of the Memphis Grizzlies, will host open tryouts for the Hustle Hype Crew for the 2023-24 season on Tuesday, September 19, at FedExForum. Registration begins at 5 p.m., with auditions starting at 6 p.m.

The Hustle Hype Crew will perform at all Hustle home games and represent the team at promo-



tional and community events in the Memphis and DeSoto County regions. The Hustle Hype Crew is a hip-hop dance team that will also interact and excite Hustle fans throughout the season. An open casting call is out for per-

formers of all backgrounds ages 18 and up. Interested candidates can go to <https://memphis.gleague.nba.com/hypecrew> to register. The Hustle will accept a limited number of walk-up candidates the day of auditions.

For more information on the Memphis Hustle, visit memphishustle.com, follow the team on Twitter/X and Instagram (@MemphisHustle) or like Memphis Hustle on Facebook.

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