

Illinois' Joe McNamara claims overall title at 2023 Bassmaster High School Combine; Mississippi's Eli French claims Technical Challenge

DECATUR, Ala. — Talented high school anglers from across the U.S. gathered for the third Skeeter Boats Bassmaster High School Combine on Wheeler Lake in Decatur, Ala., for a weekend combining skills challenges and recruiting visits in hopes of reeling in college fishing offers. After three challenges — Long-Distance Casting, Technical and Casting Accuracy — the Combine's overall points winner was Joe McNamara of Rockford, Ill.

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When McNamara heard about the Bassmaster High School Combine early last year, he knew he wanted to be a part of the event to help put his fishing career on the fast track to success. "There's really no other event like this," McNamara said. "We signed up the day that registration opened just to make sure we could be here."

The Illinois angler took full advantage of being exposed to the top college fishing programs in the country by finishing inside the Top 10 in all three skills challenges and winning the Overall Skills Challenge by a convincing margin of 21 points.

"I just wanted to go out and do my best," he said. "I knew that I had a chance to do pretty well, but I really didn't expect to win."



Eli French of Lucedale, Miss., (Technical Challenge), Joe McNamara of Rockford, Ill., (Technical Challenge & Overall), Dylan Sorrells of Dallas, Texas, (Casting Accuracy) and Tanner Hamilton of Winter Park, Fla., (Long-Distance Casting) took home awards at the 2023 Skeeter Boats Bassmaster High School Combine. (Photo by Kyle Jessie/B.A.S.S.)

Despite his impressive numbers overall, McNamara didn't get off to a great start with the three bonus-points challenges, which tested one-cast accuracy, knot tying and boater safety, but picked up momentum in a big way once he went to the Casting Accuracy Challenge.

"I missed my first flip and then made every single flip after that one to finish in under 50 seconds," he said in regard to getting the momentum back in his favor. "Then I got to the Long-Distance Casting (Challenge) and got off three casts before the time expired, with the longest cast being almost 68 yards, which I was happy about."

McNamara ended his day on a high note by tying for the fastest score in the Technical Challenge, where he maneuvered the provided Skeeter FX20 to knock

down the casting targets in just 13 seconds.

"I knew that I was doing pretty good before I got to the Technical Challenge, but didn't realize how good," he said. "I put the trolling motor on 100 and hit the targets pretty fast. I knew that if I was casting at the targets before I got up super-close to them then I would have a chance to be quicker than everyone else."

"I grew up fishing docks and shallow cover, so I consider my ability to fish shallow to be a big reason that I was able to have success in the casting challenges."

Taking home hardware is certainly an accomplishment at the High School Combine, but McNamara feels that what he gained through interaction with coaches from the top college fishing teams across the country

is what will help to continue his fishing journey.

"I didn't really know what to expect from interacting with the colleges, but it really opened my eyes to what the colleges look for in high schoolers," he said. "I think the biggest takeaway from the Combine is that I'm looking at schools that I may not have considered otherwise."

Technical Challenge

French was the co-champion of the Technical Challenge, tying McNamara's time of 13 seconds. The 11th grader used his fishing strengths to his advantage to take home the trophy.

"The way we fish rivers back home is to put the trolling motor on high and cover as much water as possible," said French. "We usually have to keep the trolling motor on 7 to 10 and make pre-

caste casts and flips to individual targets, so I felt right at home with the Technical Challenge."

Much like McNamara, French put the trolling motor on 10 and focused on making pinpoint casts to knock down the targets quickly.

"I made three total flips to the targets," he said. "I was more worried about making precise casts to the targets rather than rushing up to the targets and making short flips."

Long-Distance Casting

With a cast measuring 72 yards, Tanner Hamilton of Winter Park, Fla., took home first place in the Long-Distance Casting challenge. Third cast was the charm for Hamilton, as he used his Pro-FISHiency rod and reel to air out his longest cast of the competition on his third and final attempt.

Hamilton loves to fish offshore, so casting long distances is a big part of his game.

"I pretty much strictly fish offshore," said the junior at Chain of Lakes Collegiate High School. "I live on the Harris Chain, so I'm pretty much always making long casts at shellbars, brushpiles and other offshore cover."

Hamilton paid close attention to his competitors in hopes of figuring out the key to making the longest cast possible.

"I was constantly taking notes on how the wind was working," he said. "My first two casts were pretty bad, but I opened the reel up and let it fly on the last cast."

Casting Accuracy

With a blazing speed of 32 seconds, Dylan Sorrells of Dallas, Texas, took home the top spot in the Casting Accuracy Challenge. As a shallow-water power fisherman, Sorrells felt right at home making accurate casts when the challenge came around.

"I love flipping docks and land-downs, so that's why I was able to have success flipping and pitching to the buckets," said Sorrells, a junior at Highland Park High School who just notched a Top 20 finish at the Strike King Bassmaster High School Championship presented by Academy Sports + Outdoors. "I was able to practice a little bit before, but I was honestly shocked that I was able to make it in each bucket as quickly as I did. It just seemed surreal."

At the end of the weekend, seven anglers signed with three different schools — Faulkner University, Murray State College and Troy University. In the first two years of the Combine, more than \$4.5 million in scholarships have been awarded to participating anglers.

The 2023 Skeeter Bassmaster High School Combine was hosted by Decatur Morgan County Tourism.

Bass Fishing Hall of Fame 'Celebrates Bass Fishing Week' activities set for Sept. 28; Induction ceremony to honor Glen Andrews and late Bruce Holt

From the Water World Wire.com

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. — The Bass Fishing Hall of Fame invites anyone who has a passion for the sport of bass fishing to its 'Celebrate Bass Fishing Week' activities. The week of activities will culminate on Thursday, September 28th with an induction ceremony honoring Glen Andrews for his early tournament efforts, the late Bruce Holt for his work on modern-day bass rod development and expanding the bass fishing world, and accomplished pro bass angler Michael Iaconelli for his impact on the sport. They will be formally enshrined into the Hall that evening at Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife Museum & Aquarium. The activities on September 28th include a special plaque-unveiling ceremony sponsored by Phoenix Boats within the Hall's venue at WOW, a meet and greet reception with past inductees, dinner sponsored by B.A.S.S. at



the White River Conference Center, followed by acceptance speeches by inductees or their family representatives.

"Since the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame established a home within Wonders of Wildlife in 2017, the Hall's annual induction ceremony and all of our activities surrounding it have become a prominent event in the sportfishing world," said BFHF Board President John Mazurkiewicz. "Not only do past Hall inductees, current pro anglers on the B.A.S.S. and MLF circuits, and many of the leading fishing and marine brands support the event, our efforts in growing the promi-

nence of the Hall because of it has enabled the HOF Board to do more in supporting conservation projects to benefit bass fishing and bass anglers. We've also been able to encourage high school and college students to pursue fishery management careers with our scholarship program. Our past and new Hall inductees can take credit that their efforts in the sport of bass fishing will only help it continue to grow."

To support the Hall's 'Celebrate - Promote - Preserve' mission in the bass fishing world, along with honoring Andrews, Holt, and Iaconelli for their efforts in the sport, anglers throughout the U.S. and Canada can participate in its 'Celebrate Bass Fishing' online auction sponsored by Major League Fishing starting on Friday, September 22nd (<https://bit.ly/AuctionHOF>). Here's just a short list of some of the major items up for bid:

- 'Bucket List' fishing trip with bass fishing legend and HOF'er

Bill Dance.

- Tournament jerseys from leading professional bass anglers.
- Original artwork from noted fishing/wildlife illustrator Doug Schermer.
- Fishing trips with leading MLF pro anglers including BFHF inductees Tommy Biffle and Mark Davis, reigning Bass Pro Tour Angler-of-the-Year and Rookie-of-the-Year Matt Becker, Skeet Reese, Mark Rose, Jeremy Lawyer, Roy Hawk, Jacob Wall, Ryan Salzman, Fred Roumbanis, Jonathon VanDam, Alex Davis, and Kyle Hall, along with 2023 Bassmaster Classic winner 'Gussy' Gustafson, and Brandon Palaniuk among others.
- Rods, reels and lures from leading brands including Daiwa, Strike King, Lew's, PRADCO brands, Rapala, Big Bite Baits, SPRO, Sunline, St. Croix, Shimano, Googan Baits, Bass Mafia, American Tackle, Mustad, Abu Garcia, Berkley, Plano, Falcon Rods, Trika, and Bizz Baits.

- Technical fishing clothing from AFTCO, Simms, HUK, and Marsh Wear, plus apparel from Mossy Oak, Toyota and Mercury Marine.
 - Coolers and drinkware from PacBak, Yeti, Igloo, and Dometic.
 - Fishing adventures including big bass action and a gator hunt at Grosse Savanne Resort in Louisiana, smallmouth bass fishing trips on Lake St. Clair, the St. Lawrence River and Cayuga Lake, and snakehead fishing on the Potomac River with Fat Cat Newton,
 - Unique tour packages from the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio and the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto, along with a VIP experience at an upcoming Whiskey Myers concert.
 - Hunting items from Burris Optics, Sig Sauer, Summit Treestands, Moultrie, and more.
- The online auction can be accessed by bass fishing enthusiasts throughout the U.S. and Canada on their smartphones by

texting [bfhof](https://bit.ly/bfhof) to 243-725 or [BidPal.net/bfhof](https://bit.ly/bidpal)

The Bass Fishing Hall of Fame acknowledges the generous financial support provided by presenting sponsors B.A.S.S., Major League Fishing, Phoenix Boats; gold sponsors Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's, PRADCO Outdoor Brands, Wired2fish and; silver sponsors AFTCO, Daiwa, Rapala, Rather Outdoors, and Shimano; and bronze sponsors St. Croix, Simms Fishing, Sunline, Bass Fishing Archives, Yamaha Marine, and Costa Compete & Conserve.

A limited number of tickets to the HOF induction ceremonies and dinner remain available until Friday, September 22nd, or until the White River Conference Center facility reaches its capacity limits. To purchase tickets and/or tables — visit [bidpal.net/bfhof](https://bit.ly/bidpal.net/bfhof) - or contact Barbara Bowman at bbowman@bassfishinghof.com or call 501.541.6601.

Alabama red snapper season reopens Sept. 29

From the Outdoor Wire.com

The Marine Resources Division (MRD) of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) announces the 2023 private angler red snapper fishing season will reopen at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, September 29, for four-day weekends until the remaining federal quota is met. Alabama's 2023 federal allocation of red snapper is 591,185 pounds. The 2023 red snapper season initially closed on Sep-

"At the end of each season we make a thorough review of the landing reports and our surveys and calculations to ensure we have an accurate accounting of how much red snapper has been landed in Alabama," said Scott Bannan, MRD Director.

tember 4. A review of landing data by MRD has revealed that 15,671 pounds of Alabama's federal red snapper quota remains available for harvest. "At the end of each season we make a thorough review of the

landing reports and our surveys and calculations to ensure we have an accurate accounting of how much red snapper has been landed in Alabama," said Scott Bannan, MRD Director. "These quality control measures have identified the remaining available amount of our red snapper quota. We are reopening the season to provide full access to this important fishery and to make sure we are managing it responsibly."

ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship said reef fish man-

Please see sports page 4

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