

Easton Fothergill outlasts Smith with 'vision' to win the Bassmaster College Classic Bracket presented by Lew's

Grizzlies sign Matthew Hurt and Michael Mulder

JUNCTION CITY, Kan. — Throughout his young fishing career, several unfortunate incidents have ruined Easton Fothergill's chances at winning tournaments he felt confident about.

Whether it was a mechanical issue or things he simply defined as "dumb stuff," something always got in the way.

In mid-August, the University of Montevallo junior thought he would be adding emergency brain surgery to the list of misfortunes that derailed his path to success. But it turns out life works in mysterious ways.

"Now I know what God's vision was," he said.

Just over a month after undergoing surgery to remove an infected abscess on his brain, Fothergill won the 2023 Bassmaster College Classic Bracket presented by Lew's by catching 11 pounds, 13 ounces on the final day at Milford Lake, defeating Auburn University's Tucker Smith (9-8).

"I can't really put into words what it means to me yet," said Fothergill. "This is something I never thought I would be capable of. I never saw myself doing something like this. It is crazy special. The fact I wasn't even planning on being here and then winning it, I really can't put it into words."

The Grand Rapids, Minn., native earned a spot in the 2024 Academy Sports + Outdoors Bassmaster Classic presented by Toyota scheduled for Grand Lake O' the Cherokees near Tulsa, Okla., March 22-24. Fothergill also earned paid entry fees into a division of the St. Croix Bassmaster Opens with the use of a



University of Montevallo angler Easton Fothergill, a native of Grand Rapids, Minn., has won the 2023 Bassmaster College Classic Bracket presented by Lew's at Milford Lake. (Photo by Tommy Sendek/B.A.S.S.)

fully rigged Toyota Tundra and Nitro Boat.

After qualifying for the College Classic Bracket by winning the Bassmaster College Team of the Year title with partner Nick Dumke, Fothergill caught 10-15 in the opening round to advance to the semifinal round over Montevallo teammate Jack Alexander (9-8). Fothergill then landed 9-1 on the second day to cruise past Auburn's Hayden Marbut (6-11) before catching the tournament's biggest bag on the final day. Fothergill caught mostly smallmouth, but he caught a key largemouth each day of the tournament.

While he hails from northern Minnesota, the section of the state most people identify with when discussing its fishing su-

perlatives, Fothergill often ventured to the southern part of the state for high school tournaments.

He didn't know it at the time, but those lakes set up much like Milford Lake and that past experience helped Fothergill break down his areas this week.

"In northern Minnesota where I'm from, you can see the bottom in 20 feet of water," he explained. "You go to southern Minnesota, there is a lot of dirty water like Milford has. I had a couple of high school tournaments where we went down to those types of lakes and it was a huge learning experience, which now I think prepared me for this. I didn't know it at the time, but it prepared me for the future."

As he recovered from surgery,

Fothergill studied Google Earth for days, looking for oddities in the rock-lined banks. He discovered there were bigger boulders in several specific spots on the lake. Those boulders turned out to be the key, as Fothergill caught nearly all of his bass around bigger rock.

"It was basketball-sized boulders, not the slab rock that the lake is littered with," he said. "In the morning, they wanted the slow tapering banks and then a sharp break. The bass were in inches of water. "Most of the spots I found were while I was recuperating and resting at home."

A mix of baits contributed to his success. On Day 1, Fothergill tossed an underspin with a 3-inch swimbait along with a 3/8-

ounce double-willow spinnerbait with a translucent skirt. As the tournament progressed, a homemade finesse football jig (made by his father) paired with a Strike King Rage Menace Grub played an important role as well as a 3.5-inch Strike King Coffee Tube rigged on either a 1/4-ounce or 3/8-ounce jighead.

While the spinnerbait bite fizzled some on Day 2, it fired back up on the final day.

The wind howled over Milford Lake from the moment anglers arrived this week and that played right into Fothergill's strategy.

"My bite was wind-driven. Especially with smallmouth, you always want to chase the wind and if possible, you want the wind blowing in on your stuff," he said. "My starting spot, the wind wasn't blowing into it, but it was blowing over the point. I positioned my boat on the downwind side so I would cast into the wind so it looked more natural."

The first two days of the tournament, Fothergill achieved a quick limit and Championship Monday was no different, as he filled a limit for just over 8 pounds within the first two hours.

"Last night I knew I had to brainstorm and come up with something new. I hopped on Google Earth and found two spots that could be promising for my morning pattern," he said. "I tried my areas I had fished the first two tournament days and didn't get a bite. I went to the stuff I found on Google Earth and immediately caught a keeper and then one of my bigger ones, a 2-7."

From there, Fothergill rotated

MEMPHIS, TN – The Memphis Grizzlies recently announced the team signed forward Matthew Hurt and guard Mychal Mulder. Per team policy, terms of the deals were not disclosed. In addition, the team waived guard Josh Christopher and forward Isaiah Todd.

Hurt (6-9, 235) appeared in 45 games (13 starts) for the Memphis Hustle last season during the NBA G League Showcase and regular season and averaged 13.9 points, 3.9 rebounds and 1.3 assists in 23.0 minutes while shooting 55.8% from the field and 36.5% from 3-point range. The 23-year-old Minnesota native went unselected in the 2021 NBA Draft following his sophomore year at Duke, where he was named to the All-ACC First Team.

Mulder (6-3, 184) competed in 49 games (48 starts) for the Sioux Falls Skyforce last season during the NBA G League Showcase and regular season and averaged 16.8 points, 3.6 rebounds and 2.6 assists while shooting 39.9% from 3-point range. The 29-year-old led the NBA G League during the regular season with 129 3-pointers. A native of Canada who played collegiately at Kentucky, Mulder has appeared in 84 NBA games (12 starts) in three seasons with the Golden State Warriors, Orlando Magic and Miami Heat and has competed in 196 NBA G League Showcase and regular season games over five seasons with the Skyforce and Windy City Bulls. Christopher (6-4, 215) has ap-

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NFL and American Cancer Society launch Crucial Catch for early detection initiative; NFL contributes \$27 mil to campaign

N.Y., N.Y. - The National Football League (NFL) continues its 15-year partnership with the American Cancer Society through the launch of Crucial Catch, the NFL's early detection and risk reduction initiative. The initiative is activated on-field during games and in the community in local club markets now through Week 6 of the NFL season.

Crucial Catch empowers fans to take their health into their own hands by getting screened for cancer, educated on the importance of early detection, and discovering ways to reduce their cancer risk. Over the years, the NFL has contributed more than \$27 million to the American Cancer Society through sales of Crucial Catch branded merchandise, NFL Auction items, and general fundraising.

Funds raised aid the American Cancer Society's CHANGE Grants, which support community health centers in all 32 NFL team markets by increasing access to low or no-cost cancer screenings in communities that need it most. CHANGE Grants have contributed to more than 650,000 cancer screenings in under-resourced communities and have impacted over 1.3 million men and women with education, patient navigation and screening resources.

To address screening barriers, the following 2023 CHANGE grant recipients are offering education, screening resources and patient navigation to the communities they serve.

In addition to the CHANGE grants in each NFL market, this year, to specifically improve breast cancer outcomes, the NFL and the American Cancer Society are also piloting Links to Care Community Grants in select NFL team markets. Successful breast cancer screening programs require collaboration and well-coordinated approaches to deliver high-quality care from cancer screening-to-treatment. Select team healthcare partners and CHANGE grant-funded community health centers are col-

laborating in the Links to Care pilot program to assess challenges within the screening to treatment process and develop action plans based on evidence-based practices. See the full list of CHANGE grant and Links to Care grant recipients here.

Sleep Number, an official Crucial Catch partner, has teamed up with the NFL to present The Defender; an online tool for fans to access cancer resources – including finding their local screen center, scheduling screening reminders, and having their cancer-related questions answered through the American Cancer Society's 24/7 chat and hotline. The Defender presented by Sleep Number also features a quiz that analyzes user's health information to provide personalized recommendations on how they can reduce their cancer risk.

For the second season in a row, the Crucial Catch PSA is a part of the "We See You" campaign, focusing on the concept of Everyday Strength and featuring New Orleans Saints Tight End, FOSTER MOREAU who is in remission from a Hodgkin Lymphoma diagnosis. "When I was diagnosed with cancer, I realized that it is a journey that you need to come up with a plan for quickly with the help of others and listen to the advice of professionals," says FOSTER MOREAU. "I also saw firsthand the importance of early detection. I'm happy to use my experience and story to emphasize to others the importance of checkups and screenings."

All 32 NFL teams support the Crucial Catch initiative year-round and 20 NFL players, including Global Ambassador, Dallas Cowboys Quarterback Dak Prescott, have joined the American Cancer Society as ambassadors to amplify the impact of Crucial Catch through appearances, fundraising campaigns and social media.

NFL Crucial Catch games will feature an array of in-game visuals such as Crucial Catch game balls, goal post wraps and field-wall banners, branded on-field equipment for players, coaches, and officials among other activations to make the initiative come alive in-stadium. Game-worn Crucial Catch merchandise will be auctioned on NFL Auction at NFL.com/Auction. The NFL does not profit from the sale of Crucial Catch merchandise. Charitable contributions are donated to the American Cancer Society to support its CHANGE grant program.

NFL-issued Crucial Catch gameday apparel will feature a multi-colored logo representing all cancers. New Era and Nike have created newly designed Crucial Catch gear, highlighting the NFL's commitment to drawing awareness to and supporting multiple cancer prevention efforts. Fans can purchase NFL-licensed Crucial Catch apparel on NFLShop.com/CrucialCatch. NFL proceeds from the sale of Crucial Catch merchandise fund CHANGE grants in under-resourced communities.

Fan Creations has released a selection of Crucial Catch wooden signs to encourage those in the

fight against cancer with a positive message. These products are available for purchase on NFLShop.com with proceeds going to the American Cancer Society's CHANGE grants.

Additional Crucial Catch Activations

Super Bowl Sweepstakes

With a \$10 or more donation to the American Cancer Society, fans have the chance to enter to win a Super Bowl LVIII VIP experience, a meet & greet with Alyssa Milano and other exclusive perks through the 2024 Super Bowl Sweepstakes. Donations provide cancer screening resources in under-resourced communities and supports the NFL's Crucial Catch initiative. The Sweepstakes is supported by promotional partners Visa and Sleep Number. To enter, visit cancer.org/superbowl

100 Miles to Intercept Cancer
Beginning in October, fans have the opportunity join American Cancer Society ambassador and Detroit Lions Defensive Back Brian Branch in raising funds for the American Cancer Society. Participants will challenge themselves to "Train Like a Pro" through jogging, walking or run-

ning 100 miles. To join the challenge, visit cancer.org/crucialcatch.

Sun Safety

Crucial Catch kicked off this NFL season during training camp with an initiative to raise awareness and reduce the risk of skin cancer. Several NFL clubs offered sunscreen samples at their training camps as well as sun safety tips. Find more information at cancer.org/SunSafety.

Youth Crucial Catch

Each year, college, high school and youth football teams from across the country do their part to raise funds and help the NFL in these efforts. Schools, leagues, intramural clubs, and community athletic organizations are invited to unite with the NFL and join Youth Crucial Catch to raise funds in the fight against cancer. To register a high school football team or to sign up to fundraise, register online at youthcrucialcatch.org. To learn more about the NFL's Crucial Catch initiative, please visit NFL.com/CrucialCatch.

Crucial Catch Canada

This year, all net proceeds from Crucial Catch merchandise sold

on NFLShop.ca will be donated back to the Canadian Cancer Society.

These funds will help improve the quality of life of people affected by cancer, their families and caregivers by supporting programs and services offered by the Canadian Cancer Society such as the Cancer Information Hotline, Transportation Program and CancerConnection.ca.

Zeta Tau Alpha

Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity for women (ZTA) celebrates 25 years of partnership with the National Football League this season. In 1999, ZTA collegiate and alumnae members first distributed pink ribbons at a Washington Commanders' game. Since then, Zetas have partnered with all 32 NFL teams to support Crucial Catch and promote the early detection of breast cancer. As part of this collaboration, ZTA has handed out more than 10 million pink ribbons to NFL fans. Breast cancer education and awareness has been ZTA's national philanthropy since 1992 and its members encourage everyone to Think Pink®, a registered trademark of Zeta Tau Alpha.

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