

Jordan Lee returns to B.A.S.S. Elites with other well-known names in the 'Name-Image-Likeness' (NIL) system to vie for big victories

By Frank Sargeant, Editor
The Water World Wire.com

With Jordan Lee returning to B.A.S.S. Elites along with a number of other well-known names, pro bass fishing is showing some of the same challenges seen in college sports, where the "Name-Image-Likeness" (NIL) system has changed the game forever. The fact that several slots opened up on the Elites this fall, from the retirement of legendary names like Larry Nixon and just last weekend David Fritts, also means that top anglers who jumped to the MLF Bass Pro Tour a few years back have a chance to reconsider their options.

In pro bass fishing on the two big circuits, B.A.S.S. and Major League Fishing (MLF) Bass Pro Tour the challenge is not exactly whether you're going to get "playing time" as in college football, where a hot freshman quarterback may not like the idea of sitting on the bench for a year behind a senior and so transfers elsewhere.

In pro bass fishing, for those with the credentials it's a matter of going where your odds of winning or at least breaking even are best, and also where your sponsors—the fishing industry companies that pay many of the bills for established pro anglers or at least provide them with boats, motors, electronics, tow vehicles and tackle—feel they will get the most bang for the buck. (You also have to qualify for these tours, by winning or placing consistently in lower division tournaments at BASS or MLF.)

The Costs of Tournament Fishing Tournament fishing is always a balancing act between the costs of entry fees, equipment and travel expenses and the potential



Jordan Lee is distinguished among pro bass anglers for winning the top slots in both the Bassmaster Elites and the Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour. He will return to the Elites this year after a stint with the MLF. (Photo/Courtesy: Bassmaster)



Larry Nixon, first bass angler to total \$1 million in earnings, has announced his retirement from the Elites. This opened a return slot for Jordan Lee. Nixon is seen here with BASS founder Ray Scott. (Photo/Courtesy: Bassmaster)

of placing often enough to make a profit. Most can't obviously: it's sort of gambling on the water, where the less successful anglers subsidize the more successful. The "house", BASS or MLF, makes a profit for providing the venue. (BPT tried no-entry-fee events but couldn't make it work—they now require entry fees similar to the Bassmaster Elites.)

The \$35,000 to \$45,000 or so yearly fees aside for the top circuits, there's also the matter of tens of thousands more in travel expenses, as well as weeks away from a regular, paycheck-producing job. And for many, weeks away from family as well. When you're not fishing, you often have to attend tackle shows and media events to make yourself worthwhile to your sponsors. It's a really good way to go broke, to get divorced, to burn out early.

Those who manage to make a continuing career in pro fishing are to be admired not just for their angling know-how and physical talents, but also for their ability to stay focused and solvent despite all these challenges.

Fishing for Five Fish

Most of the pros who started prior to the origin of the MLF BPT in 2018 are used to fishing for five fish—that is, they are very good at targeting five big ones that will earn money at weigh in. The 'every fish counts' made for TV format of the BPT presented challenges for some, opportunities for others.

Jordan Lee last week told Jay Kumar, guru of Bass Blaster (<https://bassblaster.rocks/free-subscription>) that one of the reasons he jumped back to the

BASS Elites was that they still offer the five-largest-bass format that he likes best.

While MLF/BBT tried that format last year, they have announced going back to the every fish counts format for the coming year because they say the added action works best for their TV/online audiences. It would be no surprise to see a few more of the seasoned pros leaving the BPT to get back to "their" kind of fishing at BASS—but any slots vacated will be eagerly snapped up by up and coming anglers who are invited.

Another challenge for pro anglers is the advent of forward facing sonar, which now dominates many tournaments. The "video game" fishing seems definitely to favor young anglers, who have grown up tech-smart and take to the systems as easily as using their smartphones. The skills of traditional anglers, mostly older guys, are less of an advantage with the new technology.

Last but not least, most anglers are now getting most of their how-to information not from the BASS and MLF sites and television broadcasts, but from those of social media influencers. Advertisers are taking note—the return on the investment is no longer what it once was on the tournament circuits, and that could mean a less successful future for pro anglers unless they're also both good and prolific on social media.

As in all things, the wheel constantly turns, and those who turn with it—or see where it's headed in advance—come out successful.

AFTCO extends Bassmaster partnership for 2024 as supporting sponsor for the AFTCO Bassmaster Elite at Lake Fork set for February 29 -March 3

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — AFTCO will continue its long-standing partnership as a supporting sponsor of the six-series Bassmaster Tournament Trail, outfitter for B.A.S.S. staff and marshals and title sponsor for one of the Elite season's most anticipated events — the AFTCO Bassmaster Elite at Lake Fork, which will be held Feb. 29-March 3, 2024.

"As a supporting sponsor of

"As a supporting sponsor of B.A.S.S. we're extremely proud to outfit the entire B.A.S.S. staff with AFTCO fishing apparel that can be seen in the B.A.S.S. studio and in the field with tournament staff, camera crews and B.A.S.S. conservation volunteers. For 2024, we enter our fifth consecutive year of Elite Series title sponsorship," said AFTCO Marketing Director Matt Florentino.

B.A.S.S. we're extremely proud to outfit the entire B.A.S.S. staff with AFTCO fishing apparel that can be seen in the B.A.S.S. studio and in the field with tournament staff, camera crews and B.A.S.S. conservation volunteers. For



2024, we enter our fifth consecutive year of Elite Series title sponsorship," said AFTCO Marketing Director Matt Florentino. "We set our sights as the title sponsor for the Lake Fork Elite Series tournament taking place in Yantis, Texas. Like they say, 'everything is bigger in Texas,' and this fabled fishery will be one to watch for some big bass and giant bags coming to the scales." Lake Fork's big-bass potential has generated fireworks in previous years, producing a staggering nine Century Club performances the last four times B.A.S.S. has visited the 27,264-acre impoundment. This includes Lee Livesay's single-day limit of 42 pounds, 3 ounces in 2021, the third-heaviest single-day catch in B.A.S.S. history.

Among the eight AFTCO-

aligned pro anglers ready to tackle this big bass factory — and the entire Elite lineup — is Gerald Swindle, one of four anglers (including Livesay) who earned a Century belt on Fork when the Elites last visited in 2022.

"I'm super-stoked about returning to Lake Fork in February," said Swindle. "We could see some extreme conditions and super-high weights of fish being caught ... But as long as AFTCO is the title sponsor, I know I will be dry and warm."

Full coverage from all four days of the AFTCO Bassmaster Elite at Lake Fork will be available on Bassmaster.com, Tubi and the FOX Sports digital platforms. FS1 will also broadcast live with the tournament leaders on Saturday and Sunday, March 2-3.

Throughout the season, AFTCO will also be hooking Bassmaster marshals up with apparel, gear, gift cards and more.

About AFTCO Family-owned and operated, AFTCO crafts fishing apparel that provides protection from the elements and precision-built fishing tackle designed to catch the fish of a lifetime. Through AFTCO's 10% Pledge to Protect and Conserve, each year 10% of company profits towards organizations and causes working to conserve our oceans, waterways, and fish populations while protecting angler rights.

About B.A.S.S.

B.A.S.S., which encompasses the Bassmaster tournament leagues, events and media platforms, is the worldwide authority on bass fishing and keeper of the culture of the sport, providing cutting edge content on bass fishing whenever, wherever and however bass fishing fans want to use it. Headquartered in Birmingham,

Ala., 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.

The Bassmaster Tournament Trail includes the most prestigious events at each level of competition, including the Bassmaster Elite Series, St. Croix Bassmaster Opens Series, TNT Fireworks B.A.S.S. Nation Series, Strike King Bassmaster College Series presented by Bass Pro Shops, Strike King Bassmaster High School Series presented by Academy Sports + Outdoors, Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Team Championship, Yamaha Rightwaters Bassmaster Kayak Series scored by TourneyX, Yamaha Bassmaster Redfish Cup Championship presented by Skeeter and the ultimate celebration of competitive fishing, the Bassmaster Classic.

Grizzlies sign Jaylen Nowell and Shaquille Harrison to 10-day contracts

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — The Memphis Grizzlies recently announced the team signed guards Jaylen Nowell and Shaquille Harrison to 10-day contracts. Per team policy, terms of the deals were not disclosed.

Nowell (6-4, 201) has appeared in 184 regular season games (three starts) in four NBA seasons and has averaged 9.1 points, 2.2 rebounds and 1.9 assists in 17.0 minutes for the Minnesota Timberwolves since he was selected 43rd overall in the 2019 NBA Draft. This season, the 24-year-old has started three games for the Stockton Kings during the NBA G League Showcase Cup and has averaged 13.0 points, 4.7 rebounds, 3.3 assists and 3.3 steals in 24.3 minutes.

A native of Seattle, Nowell played collegiately at Washington, where he was named the 2018-19 Pac-12 Player of the Year.

Harrison (6-4, 195), a member of the Grizzlies' 2023 training camp

Please see sports page 4

Think boating this holiday season

Think safe boating this holiday season. Avoid the crowds and the "item out of stock" message this holiday season and get something every boater can use — new U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable lifejackets. Lifejackets make an excellent gift because each person on board a vessel is required to have one, and kids age 12 and younger must wear one while the vessel is underway. "Lifejackets don't last forever

and right now is an excellent time to replace them, well ahead of the boating season," said Susan Stocker, boating law administrator and education coordinator.

There are more than 215,000 registered boats in Iowa. Lifejackets for children are based on weight and must be replaced as they grow. Children's sizes range from up to 30 pounds, from 30 to 50 pounds and from 50 to 90 pounds. Adult sizes are rated for those 90

pounds and over and sizes are based on the measurements around the broadest point of the chest, similar to other jackets. Women may benefit from gender-specific life jackets for a better fit.

Have an avid duck hunter or ice angler on your list? Consider a USCG approved float coat — it protects against drowning and serves as an extra layer of warmth plus it comes in camouflage.

Matching Donors

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO DONATE A KIDNEY TO SAVE A LIFE
DONATE YOUR CAR, BOAT, REAL ESTATE, OR PLANE!**

We take donations in any condition, with fast, free pickup.

Every donation is tax deductible.

100% of the proceeds help save the lives of people needing organ transplants on MatchingDonors.com, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Call us at 781-821-2204
or donate online at
MatchingDonorsDonations.com