

Sports & Entertainment

Japan's Ito spot-on in Alabama for win in TNT Fireworks Bassmaster Elite at Smith Lake

CULLMAN, Ala. June 30., 2024— The Bassmaster Elite Series Media Guide notes that Smith Lake is Taku Ito's favorite U.S. fishery.

On Sunday, at the TNT Fireworks Bassmaster Elite Series stop at Smith Lake, he showed the world why.

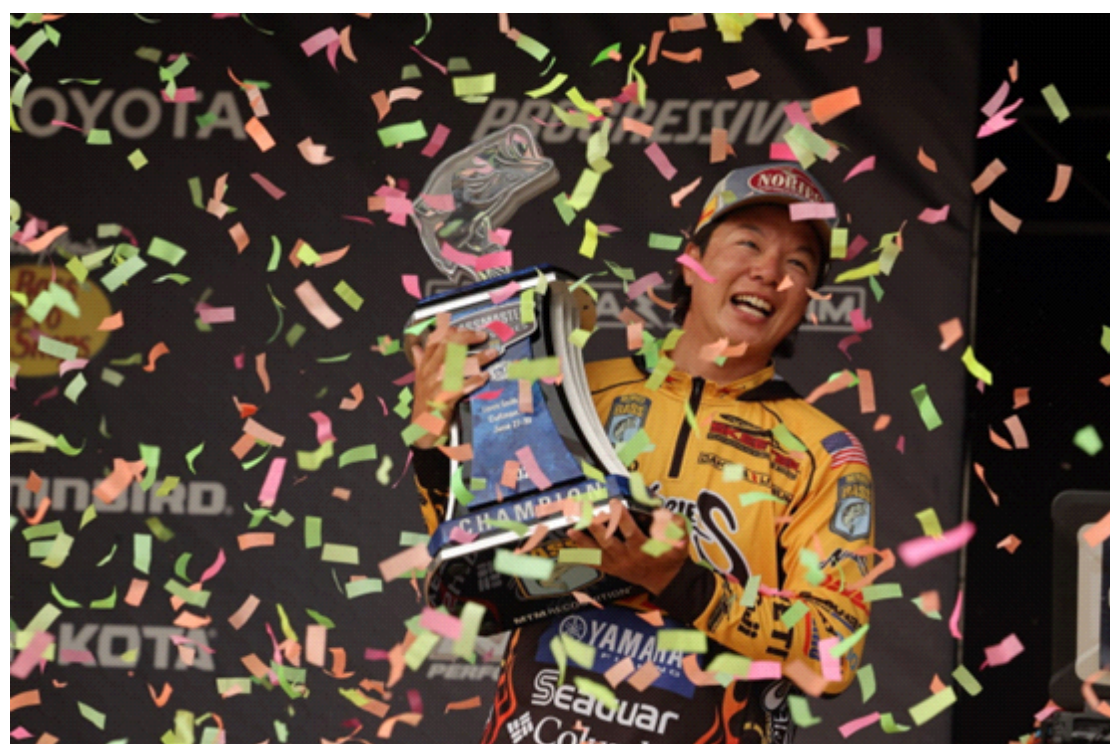
Ito, a 38-year-old pro from Chiba, Japan, led a field of 98 Elites with a four-day total of 20 bass totaling 58 pounds. That was 4-1 more than Robert Gee, who finished second with 53-15, and 4-2 more than Jay Przekurat, who placed third with 53-14.

Ito claimed \$100,000 for finishing first in the derby, which was the second Bassmaster Elite Series win of his career. He snagged \$2,000 more for having the Rapala CrushCity Monster Bag (he caught 16-9 on Championship Sunday) and separate \$1,000 prizes for the 5-12 spotted bass that anchored the bag. That fish was both the Phoenix Boats Big Bass of the day and of the tournament.

It was a wild finish to what had been a difficult tournament for many of the Elites. The Alabama heat made Smith's fabled spotted bass bite go slack at times, and most bass caught ranged from 1 to 2 pounds. The heat index, which climbed into triple digits during the final three days of the tournament, made the sluggish bite that much more grueling.

But Ito had the right mix on Smith. He caught his best bass using a 14-millimeter OSP Sankoro Dice Rubber Magnum bait. The magnum-sized lure, which is not yet in distribution, was the difference maker, he said, with the bigger size sparking Smith's spots into biting in the broiling heat. Ito said he was drop-shotting the lure rigged with a 3/16-ounce weight.

He also credited a thunderstorm that threatened north-central Alabama Sunday afternoon for changing his fortunes on Day 4. "The storm coming brought many big fish to me, in 25 feet, 30 feet (of water)," he said. "They were on brush piles. I had some smaller fish in the morning, but it all changed when the storm (threatened). I lost a 3-pounder, but that 5-12 was so



Japan's Taku Ito wins the TNT Fireworks Bassmaster Elite at Smith Lake with a total weight of 58 pounds even. (Photo by Seigo Saito/B.A.S.S.)

awesome."

Ito had bags of 13-10, 13-11 and 14-2 leading up to his tournament-best bag on Day 4. His three-day total of 41-7 trailed only Gee, who had 41-9 and the pole position to start Sunday.

Ito, Gee and Przekurat battled throughout the morning, with each grabbing the lead at one point. A single ounce separated the trio at one point mid-morning, but Ito bagged a 2-5 bass before noon that gave him a slim five-ounce cushion on his top two rivals at Smith.

He blew the derby open an hour later with his 5-12, easily the biggest bass of the tournament. "Smith Lake always is 100 percent my favorite lake," he said. "It's beautiful for sightseeing and it has beautiful bass. And the spotted bass, I like them. I don't like so much the largemouth bass and there aren't that many here. So, Smith Lake is perfect for me."

Ito said he also threw a 3.6-inch Nories Flip Gill (Neko-rigged) and a Nories Wrapping Minnow Spy Bait for key bites earlier in the tournament.

Gee, of Knoxville, Tenn., was looking for his first B.A.S.S. win. Though he fell short of that goal, he was pleased with his finish. He caught 12-6 on Championship Sunday.

"I was Livescoping the whole week for bait balls and fish roaming around the lake," he said. "I was fishing in the middle of the lake for both single fish and wolfpacks. The main baits for me this week were a 4-inch Yamamoto Shad Shape in smoke color - a natural shad color. And what really saved my butt today was a homemade hair jig that a buddy of mine from Oklahoma ties. It's like a crappie jig that's sized for bass. It was big for me today." Przekurat, of Plover, Wis., caught 12-8 on Sunday.

"I was fishing timber in the middle of the lake that had a lot of bait around it, in anywhere from 40 to 120 feet," he said. "The Strike King Baby Z-Too, in both Gray Glide and Smokey Shad, was my main bait ... It was a big week for me. Taking a Top 3 in an Elite event is huge."

Rounding out the Top 10 at Smith Lake are fourth, Cory Johnston, 53-1; fifth, Tyler Williams, 52-8; sixth, Cooper Gallant, 51-15; seventh, Kyle Patrick, 51-9; eighth, JT Thompkins, 50-7; ninth, Cody Huff, 49-

13; and 10th, Justin Hamner, 49-10.

Alabama's Hamner, winner of the 2024 Classic, leads the Progressive Bassmaster Angler of the Year standings with 595 points. Illinois' Trey McKinney is second with 571 points, followed by Missouri's Huff in third with 569, Canada's Chris Johnston in fourth with 556 and Tennessee's Jacob Foutz in fifth with 556.

McKinney leads the Dakota Lithium Bassmaster Rookie of the Year standings with 571 points, followed by Tennessee's John Garrett in second with 553 points and South Carolina's Thompkins in third with 547.

Ito also took home an additional \$3,000 for being the highest-placing entrant in the Toyota Bonus Bucks program, while Huff earned \$2,000 for being the second-highest placing entrant.

As part of the Yamaha Power Pay program, Ito earned an additional \$4,000 while Gee claimed an additional \$1,500 for being the second-highest placing entrant.

Visit Cullman hosted the tournament.

About B.A.S.S.

B.A.S.S. encompasses the Bassmaster tournament leagues, events and media platforms. For more information, visit Bassmaster.com. Connect with #Bassmaster on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.

Memphis Grizzlies select Jaylen Wells in 2nd round of 2024 NBA Draft

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — The Memphis Grizzlies announced the team selected Washington State forward Jaylen Wells with the 39th overall pick in the 2024 NBA Draft.

Wells (6-6 1/2, 206) appeared in 34 games (20 starts) as a junior and averaged 12.6 points, 4.6 rebounds and 1.2 assists in 29.2 mi-



minutes while shooting 41.7 percent from 3-point range to guide the Cougars to their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2008. The 20-year-old was selected 2023-24 Pac-12 Honorable Mention after leading the Pac-12 in turnover percentage (5.9) and ranking eighth in 3-pointers made (70).

A native of Sacramento, Wells spent his first two collegiate seasons with Division II's Sonoma State, where he was named the 2022-23 CCAA Player of the Year as a sophomore.

For more information, visit Grizzlies.com.

Email entertainment news and photos to MSTentertainment@prodigy.net

FedEx Update: Scottie Scheffler extends lead in FedEx Cup standings

Tickets on sale for the opening event of the FedExCup Playoffs at TPC Southwind, Aug. 14-18

MEMPHIS, Tennessee June 27, 2024— With his sixth title of the year at the Travelers Championship, the final Signature Event of the season, and his 12th PGA TOUR victory, Scottie Scheffler earned 700 FedExCup points to extend his FedExCup lead to 2,511 points ahead of No. 2 Xander Schauffele. World No. 1 Scheffler will make his fifth consecutive trip the FedEx St. Jude Championship when it returns to TPC Southwind, Aug. 14-18.

Golf's postseason begins at the 2024 FedEx St. Jude Championship, which invites the top 70 players in the FedExCup Playoffs and Eligibility Points List at the conclusion of the regular season with only 50 players advancing to the following week's BMW Championship. TPC Southwind plays host to the four-day, no-cut opening Playoffs event for the third year.

With his playoff victory last week, Scheffler became the first player to record six wins before July 1st since Arnold Palmer in 1962. The FedExCup lead also became the fourth player (ninth instance) with six or more TOUR titles in a season, including the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard,

THE PLAYERS Championship, Masters Tournament, RBC Heritage, the Memorial Tournament presented by Workday and Travelers Championship. Tom Kim, who finished runner-up to Scheffler at the Travelers Championship, jumped 22 spots from No. 61 to No. 39 in the FedExCup standings in pursuit of his third consecutive Playoffs appearance.

With seven weeks left until the start of the FedExCup Playoffs in Memphis, only the 70 best players will make their way to the postseason at the FedEx St. Jude Championship. Among those looking to improve their position include 2018 FedExCup Champion Justin Rose (74), Keith Mitchell (75), Kurt Kitayama (78) and Rickie Fowler (91).

The top 70 players in the FedExCup Playoffs and Eligibility Points List is available here.

As the first event of the FedExCup Playoffs, the FedEx St. Jude Championship marks the start of the PGA TOUR's most thrilling three weeks in golf where every shot counts. Don't miss out on the action! For more information about the FedEx St. Jude Championship, please visit FedExChampionship.com. Fans are also encouraged to follow the FedEx St. Jude Championship on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram for tournament updates.

