

SUNY Buffalo rocks Collegiate Bass Fishing Championship

By Dan Ladd
Editor

Florence, AL — A pair of collegiate anglers from SUNY Buffalo took fifth place in the BoatUS Collegiate Bass Fishing Championship presented by Bass Pro Shops held on Pickwick Lake June 10-11.

Austin Ocwieja, of Webster (Monroe County), and Anthony DeGrogorio, of Queensbury (Warren County), have fished several collegiate bass tournaments together representing their school's bass fishing club.

They've notched a few wins along the way, but finishing fifth out of more than 200 boats in a national tournament may be their biggest accomplishment thus far. And, they took home a \$1,000 check.

For this tournament, the rules allowed anglers to fish both Pickwick and Wilson Lakes. Both are impoundments that are part of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

But it has been several years since Wilson Lake played a significant role for a team finishing in the Top 10. Ocwieja, and DeGrogorio broke that cycle this year when they weighed in a two-day total of 33.00 pounds.

"Austin, this is the fourth year he fished it, so he knew the lake very well and him and I just have a really good chemistry fishing together," DeGrogorio said. "The first day we weighed in 14.49, and Day 2, 18.51."

"We just kind of changed things up, threw bigger baits to pick out those bigger bites and we dialed them in," DeGrogorio added. "We didn't get many bites, but the ones we did were bigger bites."

Fate may have played a small role for the SUNY Buffalo team. In March, as the COVID-19 pandemic was escalating, the two found themselves in Paris, Tennessee during spring break with plans to fish the Bass Pro Shops Big Bass Bash on Kentucky Lake. When the event was canceled — and eventu-



SUNY Buffalo bass fishing club teammates Anthony DeGrogorio and Austin Ocwieja finished in fifth place at the BoatUS Collegiate Bass Fishing Championship recently held on Pickwick Lake in Alabama. They weighed in 33 pounds of bass during the two-day tournament.

Photo courtesy of Anthony DeGrogorio
ally rescheduled for September of this year — they decided to stay in the south and head for Pickwick Lake for a few days to practice for this tournament.

That decision likely paid off, as this turned out to be the highest finish of any SUNY Buffalo anglers Bassmaster anglers at the BoatUS Collegiate Bass Fishing Championship. There's also the fact that they headed for Wilson Lake.

"After a tough week of practice focusing mainly on Pickwick Lake, we decided we would take our chances and lock up to fish the tailwater of Wheeler Dam on Wilson Lake," Ocwieja said.

Their first day limit of bass weighing 14.49 pounds was good enough for 24th place going into the final day.

"After Day 1, we decided we were going to lock up again because we really figured out where the bass were piled up and what they were doing," Ocwieja said. "Almost all of our keepers came on ned rigs, floating them on the edge of the current from the dam, but our big bites came on a variety of bigger craw-style soft plastics."

The stars aligned on Day 2 as the morning bite at the tail-race was on fire. Ocwieja said that they caught 3- to 4-pound class fish one after the other for about a three-hour span. That morning flurry yielded them 18.51 pounds of Wilson Lake bass.

"We were in first place and got to sit in the hot seat for almost an hour, that was pretty cool," DeGrogorio said. "It got a lot of exposure for the club. You're seeing all the big schools walk across the stage and we were doing better than them, so that felt great."

The strong second day effort catapulted Ocwieja, and DeGrogorio into the fifth place finish. Their 33-pound tally turned out to be just less than three pounds behind Bryan College, the winning boat that weighed in total of 35.99 pounds.

"Our finish was also a great way to end the year because it was Austin's last year fishing the tournament in Florence because he is a recent graduate," DeGrogorio said.

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ALASKA

Florida man fined for illegally killing black bear in Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska (AP) — A Florida man has been fined \$8,000 for illegally killing a black bear in Alaska's Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Matthew M. Scoble eventually fined James L. Connolly, 63, of St. Petersburg, Florida. Connolly was also ordered to forfeit the bear hide and serve two years of probation, during which he is not allowed to hunt anywhere in the United States.

Connolly previously pleaded guilty to one count of violating the Lacey Act, according to a release from Alaska U.S. Attorney Bryan Schroder's office.

Connolly's attorney, Joseph Raymond Skrha in Kenai, Alaska, didn't immediately return a message seeking comment.

Connolly shot and killed the black bear in the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area inside the national refuge on May 17, 2018, according to court documents. He then took the carcass to a tannery in California, which shipped it to Connolly in Florida.

Law enforcement officials matched DNA taken at the kill site to samples taken from the bear

Connolly had in Florida.

Scoble called Connolly's actions "abhorrent," especially since he traveled to Alaska with the intent to hunt and kill a wild animal without knowing the proper areas where he could legally take an animal, according to the release.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire awards 49 moose hunting permits for October hunt

Concord, N.H. (AP) — Forty-nine people from seven states have been awarded permits to hunt moose in New Hampshire this October.

The state's annual moose hunt lottery drawing was recently held. Winners were selected from a pool of more than 6,000 applicants. Nearly all of the 49 winners are from New Hampshire, but there also were also a handful from other states including Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Michigan and Virginia.

The hunters are assigned to specific wildlife management areas. The moose hunting season runs from Oct. 17-25.

In 2019, hunters killed 38 moose, a success rate of 76%.

GUAM

Pig-hunting derby held in Guam to feed families amid pandemic

Hagatna, Guam (AP) — The Department of Agriculture in Guam invited hunters to participate in a pig-hunting derby held on May 30 to provide food for families in need during the coronavirus pandemic.

The derby was intended to feed families, foster familial hunter development and reduce the feral pig population, the department

said in a statement.

Event organizers worked with mayors to distribute pigs whole and unprocessed to residents within their villages and provide safe handling guidelines.

Hunters without a current license were issued a special no-cost license for the two-day event, department officials said. Regular hunting licenses are also available for purchase.

The derby was funded under the Guam Hunter Education Program, through a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Grant Program.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New England Cottontail: reintroduction not self-sustaining

Durham, N.H. (AP) — University of New Hampshire researchers tracking the reintroduction of the endangered New England cottontail in the state have found that the rabbit's survival and reproduction have been successful, but reintroduction itself is not yet self-sustaining.

Wildlife biologists released 42 captive bred rabbits at the Bellamy River Wildlife Management Area in Dover. They've been watched over five years. Of those, six bred in the wild, along with nine of their offspring, resulting in at least 29 wild-born rabbits. Researchers determined that only a small percentage of the original rabbits released survived long enough to reproduce, and survival was highest in the year of the initial release.

"A single reintroduction was not sufficient to keep this isolated population persisting robustly. In the absence of natural immigration, multiple releases of cottontails are needed to prevent negative consequences of unpredictable events, such as mortality during winter snowstorms. These can lead to population decline, skewed sex ratios, and decreased genetic diversity," Adrienne Kovach of the New Hampshire Agriculture Experiment Station at UNH said.