



# 2014 Bassmaster Elite Series Tournament on the Delaware River



*by Andrew L. Shiels  
Deputy Director for Field Operations*

The eyes of the bass fishing world were focused on the tidal Delaware River during August 7 through August 10. The B.A.S.S. (Bass Anglers Sportsman Society) Bassmaster Elite Series rolled into Philadelphia for a four-day stop on the tour, which brought 107 of the best professional bass anglers in the world to the Delaware River. They were competing for a first place prize of \$100,000 and points towards various standings within their ranks.

Professional angler Mike Iaconelli, who was born in Philadelphia and grew up in and resides in southern New Jersey, was the expected favorite going into the tournament. He did not disappoint, and he won it all, but we'll get to that shortly. Mike learned to fish on Philadelphia waters such as Pennypack Creek, Montgomery County, and the Schuylkill River. He has used the skills he developed here around the United States as he has become a well-known and successful professional bass angler who has fished in 198 professional tournaments, placed in the top ten 59 times, has 8 wins and won the pinnacle of B.A.S.S. events, the Bassmaster Classic in 2003, while amassing over \$2.2 million in winnings. He has continued to learn the secrets of bass fishing in the Delaware River and how the substantial tide changes affect a species more commonly associated by most with ponds and lakes.

photos-Allan Schreffler



*Mike Iaconelli won the 2014 Bassmaster Elite Series tournament on the Delaware River.*

During the weigh-ins, many Elite Series pros commented that they enjoyed fishing the Delaware River because of its nice bass, the challenges of understanding and adapting to the tides and the availability of cover and habitat that looked “fishy.” They also stated that they had newfound respect for our local anglers and said, “If you can catch fish here, you can catch fish anywhere.” Those comments acknowledge how challenging and rewarding fishing a tidal river can be. All species of fish adjust to the conditions where they live. Changes in water temperature, sunlight, turbidity, flow, forage availability, cover and substrate determine how, when and where fish feed, reproduce and survive. A tidal river offers unique environmental conditions that fish must adapt to. Likewise, the anglers pursuing those fish must understand those changing conditions and adapt to them as well. On a lake, one or more variables can change throughout a day, week or year. On a tidal river, adding in the twice per day tide change that continues to advance by 50 minutes or so each day throughout the year continually resets the playing field. The pros who figured that out were the most successful.

The weigh-in is a combination of sport and entertainment with accompanying high-energy music to keep the crowd’s pulse up. That, combined with hearing the weights read aloud for five fish limits, seeing the best



photo-Andrew L. Shields

*Commission staff was involved in the planning and implementation of the event, and PFBC Executive Director John A. Arway helped kick off the festivities.*

Regional Outreach and Education Coordinator, provided planning assistance, logistics support and ensured our booth was staffed at the two-day event. Staff from the Bureau of Law Enforcement led by Captain Raymond Bednarchik deployed four patrol boats to ensure on-the-water safety and security for the event and the anglers. In addition, the New Jersey Marine Police and Philadelphia Police were also on the water and on hand, further emphasizing the importance of ensuring a safe experience for all. Staff from the Bureau of Engineering made sure the Frankford Arsenal Access and Tacony Boat Launch facilities were ready for the event. Joe Tusing, Huntsdale State Fish Hatchery fish culturist, was available throughout the event to receive and haul the bass to upstream areas following the daily weigh-ins. The B.A.S.S. staff and tournament organizers provided well-oxygenated holding tanks during the event, and our staff provided the expertise and transportation units to ensure that the bass made it back to the river in good condition.



photo-Andrew L. Shields

*During the weigh-ins, many Elite Series pros commented that they enjoyed fishing the Delaware River.*

of each angler’s fish displayed and the crowd’s cheering and reactions was almost as exciting as catching the fish yourself. According to organizers, there was a very good first day turnout. The crowds continued to grow, and by Sunday afternoon at the final weigh in, crowds were at capacity. This sends a strong message to B.A.S.S. that there is a substantial following of their programs in and around major metropolitan areas.

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) received an invitation to participate about a year before the event and welcomed the opportunity. Commission staff was involved in the planning and implementation of the event. PFBC Executive Director John A. Arway helped kick off the festivities by providing opening remarks at the Day 1 weigh-in, was onstage with Governor Tom Corbett on Saturday and was present throughout the event. Boating & Outreach Division staff led by Walt Dietz, Northeast



photo-Dee Fisher

*PFBC’s Bureau of Law Enforcement deployed four patrol boats to ensure on-the-water safety and security for the event.*



Delaware River

photo-Adam Spangler

This tournament was an excellent opportunity to tell the story of the Delaware River's continued rebirth as a fishery due to water quality improvements that began with the implementation of the Clean Water Act in 1972. Federal, state and local efforts to improve water quality have created conditions suitable for Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, American Shad, Hickory Shad, Striped Bass and other fishes to regain a foothold and prosper in the river. Thirty years or so ago, American Shad and other migratory species were stopped or slowed down by low dissolved oxygen levels in the so-called "pollution block" that existed in the river around the Philadelphia area. As the water quality has improved, shad now swim through former areas of concern on their way to the free-flowing sections and another 100 or more miles upstream. The Elite Series tournament and the fish that were caught for all to see shows anglers all over the country and especially those in the Delaware Valley that a viable fishery is out their back door, down the street and within their reach.

The tournament rules call for each angler to weigh in a maximum, five fish limit per day. On Thursday and Friday, 107 anglers competed, and the field was narrowed to the top 50 anglers for Saturday. Then, it was narrowed to the top 12 anglers for Sunday. On Day 1, 101 out of 107 anglers weighed in at least one fish. Boyd Duckett of Demopolis, Alabama, who had five fish weighing 16.14



photo-Adam Spangler

PFBC State Fish Hatchery staff provided the expertise and necessary transportation units to ensure that the bass were successfully returned to the waterway. Huntsdale State Fish Hatchery Fish Culturist Joe Tusing (below) shows a healthy Largemouth Bass that will be hauled upstream for release following weigh-in.



photo-Adam Spangler

pounds, brought in the top weight for the first day. That's an average bass weight of more than 3 pounds. Mike Iaconelli was in 21st place at the end of Day 1 with 9.2 pounds. However, after that, it was all Iaconelli. He weighed in 15.1 pounds on Day 2, 12.13 pounds on Day 3 and 10.14 pounds on Day 4 for a total of 47.14 pounds for 20 fish weighed over four days and the win. Including a bonus, Mike Iaconelli earned \$101,500 and 49 other Elite Series Anglers earned at least \$10,000 each. He was the favorite, because he was local, knew how to fish the tides and was driven to succeed in his home waters. However, the other 11 anglers that made the final cut hail from nine other states including Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma and Virginia, which shows that fish can be caught in the Delaware River by anglers from many places with various fishing backgrounds.

So, there can only be one winner, right? As far as the tournament goes itself, there was one winner, and it was Mike Iaconelli. However, there were many more winners as a result of this event including the Delaware River and

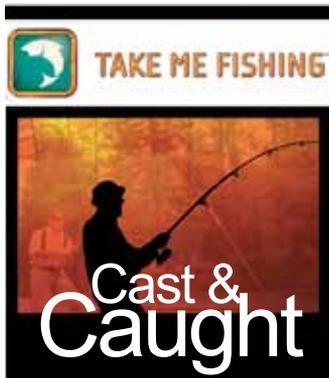
its fisheries, the City of Philadelphia and southern New Jersey. In addition, the region's bass fishing fans, proponents of water quality, local and state governments and the various sponsors and organizers of the event can share in the increased awareness, publicity and excitement that such an event brings to the area. One of the event partners in particular, the Mid Atlantic Youth Anglers and Outdoors Program, which works with youth to teach and promote fishing in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Delaware hopes this will help youth in metropolitan and suburban areas realize the opportunities that exist for them in their local waters for fishing at all levels.

For the Commission, it helps us further recognize and understand an important segment of our angling community, the industry that supports it and the fans that participate in it. B.A.S.S. holds events like this to promote its business, showcase its programs and grow the sport of fishing. Perhaps most importantly, the ability to hold a successful national fishing tournament in America's fifth largest city based around one of the nation's busiest commercial ports shows that water quality protection, hard work, money and efforts put towards improving our waterways does work and can result in better waters, better living and better fishing. ☐



photo: Dee Fisher

For the tournament, PFBC Boating & Outreach Division staff provided planning assistance, logistics support and ensured our booth was properly staffed.



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- 1 Michael A. Stimmell, Warren, hooked this 8-pound, 4-ounce, 27-inch long Walleye while fishing in the Allegheny River, Warren County.
- 2 Tonya Schaner-Klee, Hamburg, caught an 11-pound, 1-ounce, 29½-inch long albino Channel Catfish at Ontelaunee Lake, Berks County, using a minnow for bait.
- 3 Molly Pisarcik, Venetia, reeled in a 9-pound, 8-ounce, 31¼-inch Walleye from Lake Erie, Erie County. She used a Reef Runner fishing lure with an Okuma fishing rod.
- 4 Kurt Willman, age 11, pulled this 4½-pound golden rainbow trout from the Manatawny Creek, Montgomery County.
- 5 Curt Elliott, Virginia, caught a nice 4-pound, 22-inch Largemouth Bass while fishing in Tionesta Lake, Forest County.