

The Road to State

By Fred Myers, with Adam, Andrew and Dane
Moms, Dads and Coach Foster – Thank you all

To make this program successful, it took a vision from Terry Brown, the IHSA, and Bloomington-Normal Bass Club, the parents, the kids and their friends. It also required bass clubs across the state and volunteers to take the kids fishing that didn't have boats or tackle, and to freely give the knowledge and help to encourage the boys and girls to follow their passion to bass fish at all levels on their way to the Sectionals.

I'm writing this letter today, number one because I was asked to. But also more importantly, it's because I need to.

I volunteered a boat in the beginning to take the kids on Lake Evergreen in preparation for the Sectionals that would be held there. Along with me were Scotty, Jerry, Jamie, Rod, Larry (Reece and Russell), James, Brad and Dave Norris, Ron, Dennis, and others I'm sure I've forgotten to mention.

When it came down to being a boat captain for Sectionals, I was chosen to represent Normal Community High School's team of Adam and Andrew Bean, whom I might say were there for all the seminars we (the bass club) held to provide information and educate them. Their commitment paid off and helped them to qualify for Sectionals along with Dane as the alternate.

The day started off with high hopes, high expectations and high winds for all of us. We fished all the spots that we practiced in on Wednesday night, but only one spot produced. Andrew caught that fish on a chatter bait in the cove by the primitive camping area on the south main lake bank. The other fish was caught by Adam on the left side of the pump house in the reeds. He was using a black neon tube.

Then we got the call to switch fishermen. We were up the creek on the right side of the small island fishing about 12 o'clock. We came back to pick up Dane, switch tackle and headed out to fish. Since we were close to the community cove straight south of the ramp, we went over there. My man Dane was throwing a spinnerbait in the perfect spots, slow-rolling a little deeper and hooked up with a beautiful 2 ¾ pound bass. That fish was in the boat and live well within minutes of Dane coming aboard. High fives flew around the boat along with smiles and yells by all of us.

It was enough with those three fish to win the Sectionals and a trophy for their school. It was a great feeling for everybody around, including Mr. and Mrs. Bean and the other family members there to cheer them on.

The next step was to get ready to fish for State. The boys came over to the house where we studied maps, tackle selections and talked strategy for several hours. I talked to Coach (Nathan) Foster several times to confirm times and dates in preparation for our trip to Carlyle Lake and the State Finals. *"Oh, boy, I can't wait to fish this lake!"*

During the course of the last two and a half years, the IHSA, Terry Brown, Dave Gannaway, Jerry Martoglio, we as a club and all the other clubs, parents, friends and volunteers in the state of Illinois pulled off hosting the first High School Bass Fishing tournament. It was held on May 7, 8 and 9, 2009, in Carlyle, Illinois.

As you know, a lot of you guys, myself included, have been in or watched some big-time tournaments in our lives. But I'll have to truly say that what I saw firsthand this weekend was the best yet for me. As a boat captain for Normal Community High School with three of the most determined, hardworking fishing fanatics I've been around was inspiring to me. Adam, Dane and Andrew were a pleasure to be around.

They were there 100% of the time for their school. There is a lot of school pride inside these guys that they may not show to us, but I saw it shine this weekend. They truly worked hard all three days under tough fishing conditions to try and bring the State trophy home.

We all worked, talked about and planned our strategy to try and do just that. But after it was all over on Saturday, we fell short on the scales by not catching a keeper for two days. We did have, truly Adam had, a nice 2 and a half to three-pound fish come unbuttoned Saturday first thing in the morning. That would have been a great fish to weigh in, but that's fishing as we so often say.

But that fish meant so much to him, his teammates, his school and I that it showed the moment it came off. I felt his pain as I watched him fall to his knees with his head in his hands, screaming a loud and long "NO!" Afterwards, he got up and looked at me and I looked at him but never said a word. He just turned back and started fishing as intensely or even more so the rest of the day.

Andrew was also in the boat with all his heart the first day fishing for his school, his team and himself. Dane fished day two with the most positive attitude, heart and skill as any one out there. He wanted that hardware for his school bad!

So, let me put it all in perspective from what I saw in these three athletes. Yes, bass fishing is a very demanding sport not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. They gave it their all over three tough days at State. My fishing hat is off to them.

Thank you for letting me be part of your experience, part of you guys making bass fishing history as Illinois pioneers the country in high school level competitions. Once the word gets out about how great it is to be a bass angler, there will be no looking back.

If you see me out on the water or at one of our club meetings, ask me how it was. I'll be glad to tell you it was simply fantastic for the sport of bass fishing. And, I'll say it again to any of the kids, parents and anyone who doubts what it takes to do this competitively, this truly is a sport, a very demanding sport.

Thanks,
Fred Myers