



UNIQUE MSU TEAM

Often Lured from Campus

Kenneth Billings



MSU Bass Club sponsor Ronald Parker

By Kenneth Billings

For many Mississippi State students, spring's arrival brings to mind baseball and charcoal grills fired up in the outfield at Dudy Noble Field.

For a smaller group of dedicated sports enthusiasts, spring means setting their sights in a far different direction

from anything on the university campus. The eight-member MSU Bass Club is busy representing the university in the Collegiate Bass Angler Association (CBAA)—and looking to improve on a No. 3 national ranking scored last fall.

"When I heard about the CBAA, I saw it as an opportunity to do something I love while representing my university," said club president and cofounder Calvin S. "Cal" Clark.

"I have been around competitive fishing all of my life because my father was a competitive angler," the senior accounting major from Lawrenceburg, Tenn., explained. "I competed in my first tournament when I was 5, and I have been doing it ever since. I saw this as a chance to go to the next level and compete against other collegiate anglers."

The MSU Bass Club was founded last summer by Clark and close friend and fishing partner Sam Lawrence, a graduate student in agribusiness management from Jackson, Tenn. Since forming the group, they've been joined by six other students skilled enough to compete in tournaments around the country.

The other team members include Brad M. Aldridge, a senior wildlife and fisheries major from Maben; Mitchell R. "Mitch" Crane, a senior biological sciences major from Columbus; James W. "Wes" Gibson, a senior liberal arts major from Artesia; David H. "Harry" Halliwell IV, a sophomore forestry major from Hattiesburg; Christopher A. "Chris" Rivers, a graduate student in physical education from Ocean Springs; and Bradley T. Sartain, a sophomore biological sciences major from Madison.

The ultimate goal of the team is to qualify for the two premier championships: the ESPN Under Armour College Bass National Championship and the Fox College Sports National Championship.

In 2007, the MSU team placed fifth in the ESPN tournament and among the top 15 in Fox's championship. Its No. 3 national ranking came behind top-ranked Virginia Tech University and second-ranked Texas A&M University.

Other top 20 southeastern schools include the University of Alabama, fourth; Faulkner State Community College (Bay Minette, Ala.), seventh; University of Arkansas, 11th; Arkansas

Technological University, 12th; and University of Tennessee, Martin, 19th.

Clark said one of the biggest challenges facing the fishing Bulldogs is funding. Because it's not a National Collegiate Athletic Association-sanctioned sport, university funds are not available to assist with travel, lodging, equipment and supplies. As a result, members carry the bulk of the financial burden.

The Bass Club is not without support, however. As Clark proudly points out, at least one alumnus has been a big part of the club's successful competitive effort.

Ronald W. "Ron" Parker of McKinney, Texas, is a 1972 accounting graduate who now is chief executive officer of Lake Fork Trophy Lures. In addition to manufacturing a line of high-end bass lures, he also provides professional guide services on Lake Fork, a 27,200-acre compound located in the Lone Star State's northeast corner.

Parker has served as a board member of the MSU Alumni Association and the Bulldog Club and has two daughters currently enrolled at MSU. He learned of the Bass Club's activities and saw it as another opportunity to merge his passion for fishing with his passion for his alma mater.

"One of my pro staffers told me about the collegiate tournament in Louisville, Texas, and that MSU had a team there," said Parker. "The next time I went to MSU, I tracked them down and have been helping them since.

"I told (the club members) that any time they needed help, I'm your guy and it is my pleasure and my passion to do so," the Charleston, Miss., native continued. "Beyond my family, my friends and my faith, I can think of very few better things to do with my free time than to support MSU, whether it be athletics, academics or helping these guys with their sport."

Clark estimated that each team member has expenses of \$500 to \$1,000, not including the equipment necessary for tournament competitions. He also said Parker has provided team members with more than \$2,000 in lures and tackle since last summer.



Submitted

MSU Bass Club anglers Cal Clark (second from left) and Sam Lawrence (second from right) weigh in their catches at the 2007 ESPN Under Armour College Bass National Championship near Little Rock, Ark.

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