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2018 – Bass Nation Championship – Pickwick Lake – Florence, Alabama USA

I was fortunate to qualify and compete for a second time as Non-boater in the 2018 Bass Nation Championship at Pickwick Lake, Florence, Alabama. It was an absolute honour to represent Namibia in this prestigious event against some of the best anglers in USA and around the world.

After about 40 hours of travelling we arrived in Florence at the Mariot Shoals Hotel, checked in and rested after the long flights. The next day we went to tackle shops to source some additional baits/tackle that I still needed from researching the lake for some time. Florence city is a beautiful and the people there are very friendly and helpful.

Mr Richard Grant managed to secure us a “pre-practice” boat from the chairman of the Alabama Bass association, Mr Eddie Plemons, who referred us to one of his members, Ferlin Weeks who rented us his fully rigged competition bass boat.

Pickwick Landing Dam is located nearly 207 miles (333 km) above the mouth of the Tennessee River, a few miles north of the point where the states of Tennessee, [Alabama](#), and [Mississippi](#) meet. This stretch of the river is also a geological boundary between the scattered hills of the Western [Highland Rim](#) to the northeast and the flatlands of [West Tennessee](#) to the northwest. Pickwick Landing Dam is 113 feet (34 m) high and 7,715 feet (2,352 m) long and has a generating capacity of 240,200 [kilowatts](#). The dam's spillway has 22 bays with a combined discharge of 650,000 cubic feet per second (18,000 m³/s). Pickwick Lake has 496 miles (798 km) of shoreline and 43,100 acres (17,400 ha) of water surface, and has a flood-storage capacity of 417,700 acre feet (515,200,000 m³). Pickwick Landing Dam is serviced by two locks— one measuring 110 by 1,000 feet (34 by 305 m) and the other measuring 110 by 600 feet (34 by 183 m). The locks' lift raises and lowers vessels up to 63 feet (19 m) between Pickwick and Kentucky lakes

The 3 day Pre-practice was tough. It was the beginning of the Fall season and changing weather conditions scattered the fish and forced them to react to baits and areas differently every day and it was difficult to establish a pattern. After familiarizing the lake, we started getting fish shallow and deep.

At registration we were treated with free goods from sponsors, a tournament briefing and dinner. We also met up with our other African team contenders from South Africa and Zimbabwe who we compete against throughout the year back home. The next day was official practice and BASS provided us a brand new professionally fully rigged Phoenix bass boat. The organization of this tournament is just superb, and the staff really treat you like a professional, anything you ask, or need is sorted out immediately.

At official practice, fishing with my brother Alec Williams (Boater division) we got onto some really good fish and areas and we were confident that if the weather played along, we could catch some good bags. Most of the other anglers we spoke to said they had really bad practice and that the lake fished completely different from pre-fish practice before the one month cut off period prior to the competition.

During the tournament days a really bad cold front came through which brought lots of rain, raising the river by 7ft, wind and temperatures dropping to -1C°. The TVA was pulling current at full, to drop river levels and prevent flooding. The only thing I could do is to adapt as the conditions were the same for every competitor.

I was paired to fish with an angler from Georgia – Donald Tully the first day. We fished different areas where he got some fish during his practice. Fishing was tough, and my boater managed to weigh 3 fish for the day. The next day I fished with an angler from Oklahoma TJ Martin. We ran 104km down to Pickwick dam wall and fished a creek where he caught a good bag the previous day. The creek turned muddy overnight with all the rain and the bite was slower. Two hours before weigh in we decided to run back as the wind from the south picked up drastically and the current being pulled from the north made it a very rough ride back, through 6ft high waves. We barely made weigh in at 14:00 soaking wet from spearing the wakes. TJ weighed 3 fish for the day.

Unfortunately, the fish that I did catch during the tournament was just shy of the 15inch limit which is a pretty decent size fish in other tournaments. I fished my heart out and I felt like I could land good fish every cast, fishing the same techniques / baits as competitors that did weigh fish. Fishing a river system where they pull current daily are very different from what I am used to, and it was interesting to see how other anglers from the US approach fishing “current”. The whole experience however was a very good learning curve and makes you a better angler.

The competitors / staff you meet there are very friendly and helpful and become friends by staying in contact.

Executive Council:

Richard Grant (Chairman) • Alec Williams (Vice Chairman) • Collette Carstens (Secretary) • Neels van Tonder (Treasurer)
Hendrik Pretorius (Tournament Director) • Nic Kruger (Conservation Officer) • Johan Coetzee (Development Officer)
• Andrew Hall (Public Relations Officer)



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I would like to thank the entire Namibia Bass angling association for all the effort and personal time they put in to manage, promote and grow the sport, especially Richard Grant our chairman who work countless hours for the sport of Bass Fishing in Namibia and BASS globally, all our local sponsors, my family and friends who supported me and Jon Stewart and his professional team from BASS who makes dreams come true for the working class anglers all over the world.

Lastly, I would like to thank my brother Alec, who helped and supported me to experience this lifelong memory with him in the USA.

Thinus Williams

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