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Academy Outdoor and Sport, Bass Nation Final, Lake Conroe, Tx
17-19 November 2016

Having qualified in 2015 to represent the Namibian BASS Nation in the Nation Finals was not only a dream comes true, but something I've personally worked for since I've first saw the Bassmaster Classic on Super Sport on DSTV. This honor to represent the Namibian Bass Nation was not an undertaking that I would take lightly as I've been to some of the USA lakes on previous trips and just the vastness of it can derail even the best anglers.

Lake Conroe is a 85 km² lake in [Montgomery County, Texas, United States](#). Even though it is named Lake Conroe, only a small portion of the lake is in [Conroe, Texas](#). Most of the lake is in unincorporated Montgomery County. The lake lies on the West Fork of the [San Jacinto River](#), just west of [Interstate 45](#) off [State Highway 105](#) in [Montgomery](#) and [Walker counties](#). Lake Conroe is a popular attraction for boating, jet-skiing, and fishing.

The lake runs through classic [East Texas](#) Piney Woods forests. Water quality is generally good, with an average depth of 20.5 feet, and a maximum depth of 75 feet. The lake extends about 34km in length and covers 81.41 km²

Lake Conroe was conceived in 1970 as an alternate water supply for the city of Houston. The lake was completed in January 1973, and it was filled on October 31, 1973.

Trying to get some local knowledge and experience on the lake I've identified a local tournament called the Bass Pro Shops Texas Big Bass Tournament that was held on Saturday 8th October and Sunday 9th October on the lake. This experience and local knowledge gained during this stay help me a lot when the Finals came along as I already knew the lake and the areas you could run your boat safely.

2016 saw the first time that each nation could send a boater and non-boater representative to the finals as well as a optional pre-practice time from Saturday 12th - Monday 14th November. I've decided to take this opportunity to see if the areas I've identified as possible Fall feeding areas where Bass mainly zone in on the local shad population that is abundant in the lake.

Through research and local information I've realized that the bass in Lake Conroe mainly relate to docks, sunken brush-piles of old Christmas trees or an area called the "jungle" mostly consisting of natural forest and submerged trees. The pre-practice allowed my non - boater (Alec Williams) and I to explore all three these possible scenarios to try to determine where we could get a bigger bite as the local size limit on the lake is 16 inches and not 14 as normally in all BASS tournaments.

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*Richard Grant (Chairman) • Alec Williams (Vice Chairman) • Collette Carstens (Secretary) • Neels van Tonder (Treasurer)
Malcolm Goosen (Tournament Director) • Hendrik Pretorius (Conservation Officer) • Anton de Wit (Development Officer)
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The pre-practice time made us come to the conclusion that the bass are not fully on the fall pattern but in a transition phase still due to unseasonal warm weather. They would only feed at certain times during the day but we had no problem in getting some bites and making sure that these are the correct bites that will make it to the scales come tournament day. We even were so lucky as to have access to a 21ft Triton bass boat belonging to defending champion Albert Collins.

Tuesday the 15th was the official registration day and allowed us to, do some final shopping at the local Academy Sports and Outdoors for lures that we discovered during pre - practice that were getting better bites. My main rigs were a 6th Sense square bill crank that got good reaction bites and the many rocky areas that we identified during scouting. The Zoom Trick Worm in Black seems to work best when rigged on a 3/4 ounce shakeyhead and my personal favorite the Garry Yamamoto 5 inch Senko in black and blue rigged Texas.

Official practice day on Wednesday the 16th November got me and Alec out on the Bass Nation supplied 21ft Phoenix with a 250 hp Yamaha outboard. This amazing boat came complete with Lowrance Hds12 Gen 3 side-scan and 112 lbs Minn Kota motor on the front. During practice we just cemented the patterns already discovered during the time spend on the water. The bites were not as aggressive as been on the previous days and I personally thought this was due to the Super Moon that we had Tuesday and that the fish already being in transition would bite the next day even though it was a bit slower.

First tournament day was on Thursday the 16th and all boats were launched by the local organizers and the 6 brand new Toyota Tacoma trucks on hand. Safety takes priority in all BASS sanctioned events same as back home with boat inspections getting underway as soon as you are in the water. The first flight left the marina just after 6 am and the second flight just behind them. If there are no delays the normal tournament day would only allow you 8 hours before you have to be back, making decisions during the day of vital importance on how long you give an area or pattern before you move on. My non - boater for the first day was Ron from the Zimbabwe BASS Nation. This was great as we have fished against each other on various occasion back home in the Region 5 Internationals and now I got to fish with him. We decided that the first place that we would target was the dam wall area with vast amounts of rocks that I could crank with my 6th Sense Square-bill that have already proofed its effectiveness during practice. It was not long before I had the first fish in the boat but it being just under the 16 inch size limit had to go back into the lake. This unfortunately set the tone for the rest of the day and later at the boat service yard not only for my but most of the anglers on day one.

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We moved on to an area on the opposite end of the lake where I thought I would have this all to myself due to the difficulties of getting there through all the flooded timber and stump fields that can potentially end your day should you hit it on full plane. Unfortunately another angler as well as some local spectator boats and anglers were in this area already. Ron and I fished the drains and channels as well as some holes that I discovered during scouting. The fish were very tough to get. To bite and if you did hook one it was just short. At this stage we had to make a call to leave this area and cover more water and structure that we had planned to fish. Leaving the "jungle" area we discovered that a very strong southerly wind as come up thus making it nearly impossible to fish any offshore structure as well as some wave that were pounding the shoreline and taking the shallow crank bite out of the possible rigs you could comfortably fish. Missed opportunities as well as that 16 inch size limit hounded both my and Ron on the first day.

Returning to the weigh-in we realized that 90% of the field had the same results as we did and this however gave me confidence that I could still turn my tournament around should I get on some bigger fish on day two.

Day 2 saw me paired with Daniel and I got to his story of survival and experience the absolute love for life that he has. Learning from the first day we went in search of bigger bits in deeper areas. Quickly we were catching them on a Zoom Trick worm but story remained the same. Enough bites to be able to weigh a limit unfortunately just short of the 16inch local size limit. Missed opportunities with the both of us saw Daniel break a 5lbs of on a dock fishing a black and blue tube that he makes himself and me loose a keeper on the same docks. Returning to the "jungle" area, this time with better weather, saw us getting into some better bites quickly and Daniel landing a very good 5 lbs plus bass. I however got fish too, but it would seem that the 1 cm size increase that I so had hoped for was still eluding me. A massive thunder storm front moved into our area just after 11 am and this with the winds blowing ice cold out of the north made this area impossible to fish. Knowing that we had a keeper in the boat and that the conditions were getting hairy due to the huge waves already forming because of the strong winds we decided to head back and fish structure on the way home. This was however not meant to be due to the storm and we returned to an area that we fished during the Big Bass Tour event couple weeks prior. Less than 20 minutes left to fish in the day saw me get a bite on some broken concrete scattered below waterline. I set the hook and sure thought by the way this fish thought that this one will get me to the stage and on the sheets, however this was not meant to be with the tail of the fish just brushing the wrong side of the 16inch line on the measurement board. My tournament ended exactly how it began.

The third day was blown out and postponed and this gave me an opportunity to go and fish other lakes in the area on Sunday. Without support from friends and family I would not have

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been able to live this dream and come back wanting to get on my local dam to not only try the techniques learned but making sure that I get to one day qualify again. Thank you to everyone that assisted me in this venture. My wife Heidi, my American family and friends and the Namibia BASS Nation executive.

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